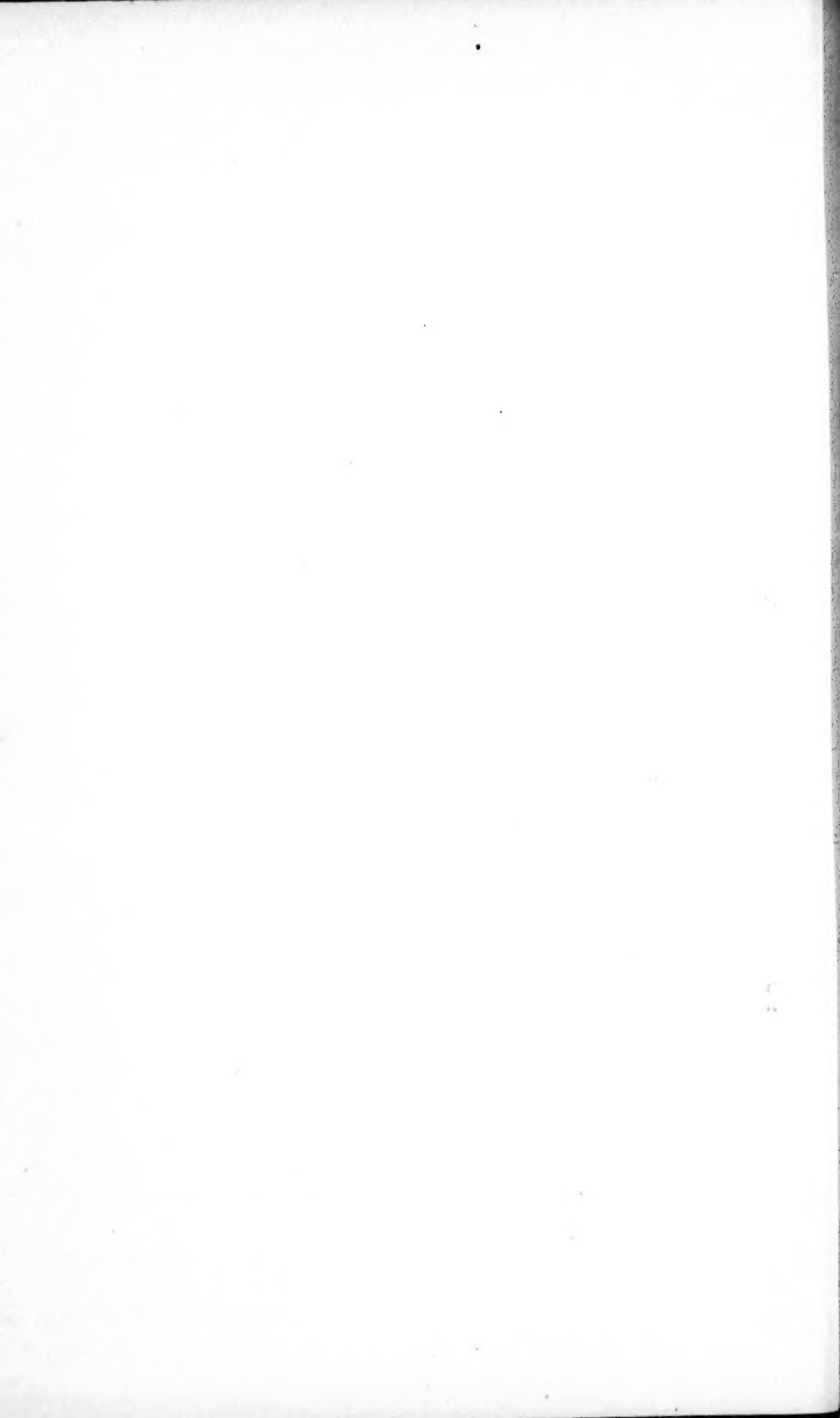




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THE SCALLYWAG

BY
GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF
'THE TENTS OF SHEM,' 'IVAN GREET'S MASTERPIECE,' ETC



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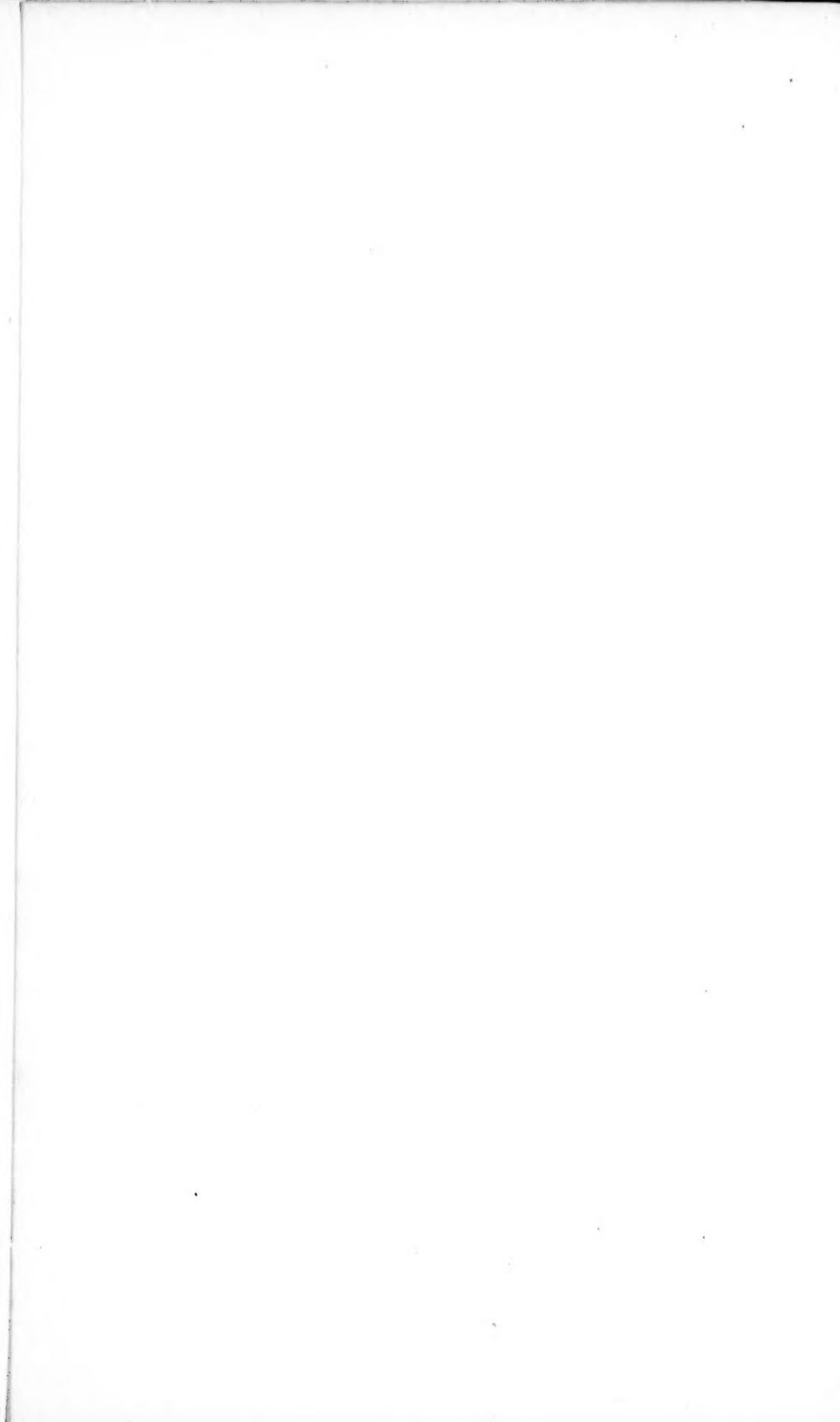
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THE SCALLYWAG

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

How curiously different things look to each of us according to our particular point of view! While Faith and Paul at Hillborough and in London were reflecting seriously how to make things decent for the Thistleton family at the approaching ceremony, the Thistletons in turn, in their opulent mansion in the park at Sheffield, were all agog with the unwonted excitement of preparation for their Charlie's marriage with the sister of Sir Paul Gascoyne, fifteenth baronet.

'The wedding must be in London, of course,' Mrs. Thistleton said musingly—she

was a comfortable body of a certain age, with a maternal plenitude of face and figure; 'and Sir Paul 'll give her away himself, you may be certain. I suppose they won't want it to be at Hillborough, Charlie? I'd much rather, for my part, you should be married in London.'

'I think Faith would prefer it, too,' Thistleton answered, smiling. 'You must remember, mother dear, I've always told you they live in a very quiet way of their own down at Hillborough; and I fancy they'd rather we were married—well, away from the place, of course, where they've just lost their poor father.'

'Naturally,' Mrs. Thistleton went on, still turning over with those matronly hands of hers the patterns for her new silk dress for the occasion, sent by post that morning—the richest Lyons—from Swan and Edgar's. 'There'll be an account of it in the *World*, I suppose, and in the *Morning Post*, and the bride's dress 'll be noticed in the *Queen*. I declare I shall feel quite nervous. But I suppose Sir Paul will be affable, won't he?'

Her son laughed good-humouredly.

'Gascoyne's a first-rate fellow,' he answered unabashed; 'but I can hardly imagine his being affable to anybody. To be affable's to be condescending, and Gascoyne's a great deal too shy and retiring himself ever to dream of condescending to or patronizing anyone.'

'Well, I hope Faith won't give herself any airs,' Mrs. Thistleton continued, laying four fashionable shades of silk side by side in the sunlight for critical comparison; 'because your father's a man who won't stand airs; and I should be very sorry if she was to annoy him in any way. It's a great pity she couldn't have come up to stay with us beforehand, so that we might all have got to know a little more about her and not be so afraid of her.'

'It would have been impossible,' Thistleton replied, gazing across at his mother with an amused air. 'But I wish I could disabuse your mind of these ideas about the Gascoynes. Paul and Faith will be a great deal more afraid of you than you are of them; and as to Faith giving herself airs, dear girl! she'll be so awfully frightened, when she comes to

stay here, at the size of the house and the number of the servants, that I wouldn't for worlds have had her come to visit us before she's married, or else I'm certain she'd try to cry off again the moment she arrived for pure nervousness.'

'Well, I'm sure I hope you're right,' Mrs. Thistleton replied, selecting finally the exact shade that suited her complexion, and laying it down by itself on the costly inlaid table that stood beside the Oriental ottoman in the alcove by the bay-window. 'For though, of course, one naturally likes to be connected with people of title, and all that, one doesn't want them to trample one under foot in return for all one's consideration.'

But at the very same moment, away over at Hillborough, Faith, as she sat in her simple black frock by the window of her new lodgings stitching away at the skirt of her wedding-dress with aching fingers, was remarking to her mother :

'What I'm afraid of, dear, is that, perhaps, Charlie's father and mother will turn out, when one comes to know them, to be nothing more or less than nasty rich people.'

To which her mother wisely answered :

‘If they’re like himself, Faith, I don’t think you need be afraid of them.’

In accordance with the wish of both the high contracting parties, it had been finally arranged that the wedding should take place in London. Mr. Thistleton senior, therefore, went up to town a week or two in advance, ‘to consult with Sir Paul,’ whom he was able to guarantee in his letter to his wife the same evening as ‘extremely amicable.’ But it would be quite out of the question, the master cutler observed, when he saw the fifteenth baronet’s present abode, that Miss Gascoyne should be married from her brother’s chambers. (Mr. Thistleton senior, influenced by somewhat the same motives as Mr. Lionel Solomons, wrote ‘chambers’ in the place of ‘lodgings’ even to his wife, because he felt the simplicity of the latter word unsuitable to the fifteenth baronet’s exalted dignity.) So he had arranged with Sir Paul—much against Sir Paul’s original wish—to take rooms for the breakfast at a West End hotel, whither the bridal party would proceed direct from the altar of St. George’s.

Of course the ceremony was to be the simplest possible—only a few very intimate friends of either family; but the master cutler couldn't forbear the pleasure of the breakfast at the hotel, and the display of Sir Paul, in the full glory of his fifteenth baronetcy, before the admiring eyes of a small but select Sheffield audience. If they smuggled their baronet away in a corner, why their Charlie might almost as well have married any other girl whose name was not to be found in the pages of the British book of honour. To all these suggestions Paul at last gave way, though very unwillingly, and even consented to invite a few common Oxford friends of his own and Thistleton's, including, of course, the invaluable Mrs. Douglas.

From the very first moment of Paul's return from Hillborough, however, it began to strike him with vague surprise and wonder what an immense difference in people's treatment and conception of him was implied by his possession of that empty little prefix of a barren *Sir* before the name bestowed upon him by his sponsors at his baptism. When

he took the dingy lodgings in the by-way off Gower Street, and handed the landlady's daughter one of the cards Mr. Solomons had so vainly provided for him, with 'Sir Paul Gascoyne' written in very neat copper-plate upon their face, he was amused and surprised at the instantaneous impression his title produced upon the manners and address of that glib young lady. The shrill voice in which she had loudly proclaimed to him the advantages of the rooms, the cheap price of coals per scuttle, the immediate proximity of the Weslee-yan chapel, and the excellence of the goods purveyed by appointment at the neighbouring beef-and-ham shop, sank down at once to an awestruck 'Yes, sir; I'm sure we'll do everything we can to make you comfortable, sir,' the moment her eyes lighted on the talismanic prefix that adorned his name on that enchanted pasteboard.

A few days later Paul decided with regret, after many observations upon his scanty wardrobe, that he really couldn't do without a new coat for Faith's wedding. But when he presented himself in due course at the little tailor's shop in the City ('specially

recommended by Mr. Solomons') where he had dealt ever since his first appearance at Oxford, he noticed that the news of his acquisition of dignity had already preceded him into the cutting and fitting room by the unwonted obsequiousness of both master and assistants as they displayed their patterns. 'Yes, Sir Paul. No, Sir Paul,' greeted every remark that fell from his lips with unvarying servility. It was the same everywhere. Paul was astonished to find in what another world he seemed to live now from that which had voted him a scallywag at Mentone.

To himself he was still the same simple, shy, timid, sensitive person as ever; but to everyone else he appeared suddenly transformed into the resplendent image of Sir Paul Gascoyne, fifteenth baronet.

Strangest of all, a day or two before the date announced for the wedding in the *Morning Post* (for Mr. Thistleton senior had insisted upon conveying information of the forthcoming fashionable event to the world at large through the medium of that highly-respected journal), Paul was astonished at

receiving a neatly-written note on a sheet of paper with the embossed address, 'Gascoyne Manor, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.' It was a polite intimation from the present owner of the Gascoyne estates that, having heard of Sir Paul's accession to the baronetcy, and of his sister's approaching marriage to Mr. C. E. Thistleton, of Christ Church, Oxford, he would esteem it a pleasure if he might be permitted to heal the family breach by representing the other branch of the Gascoyne house in his own proper person at the approaching ceremony. Paul looked at the envelope; it had been readdressed from Christ Church. For the first time in his life he smiled to himself a cynical smile. It was evident that Gascoyne of Gascoyne Manor, while indisposed to admit his natural relationship to the Hillborough cabman, was not unalive to the advantages of keeping up his dormant connection with Sir Paul Gascoyne, of Christ Church, Oxford, fifteenth baronet.

However, it appeared to Paul on two accounts desirable to accept the olive-branch thus tardily held out to him by the other

division of the Gascoyne family. In the first place, he did not desire to be on bad terms with anyone, including even his own relations. In the second place, he wished for the Thistletons' sake that some elder representative of the Gascoyne stock should be present, if possible, at his sister's wedding. His mother absolutely refused to attend, and neither Paul nor Faith had the heart to urge her to reconsider this determination. Their recent loss was sufficient excuse in itself to explain her absence. But Paul was not sorry that this other Gascoyne should thus luckily interpose to represent before the eyes of assembled Sheffield the senior branches of the bride's family.

Nay, what was even more remarkable, Paul fancied the very editors themselves were more polite in their demeanour, and more ready to accept his proffered manuscripts, now that the perfect purity of his English style was further guaranteed by his accession to the baronetcy. Who, indeed, when one comes to consider seriously, should write our mother-tongue with elegance and correctness if not the hereditary guardians

of the Queen's English? And was it astonishing, therefore, if even the stern editorial mouth relaxed slightly when office-boys brought up the modest pasteboard which announced that Sir Paul Gascoyne, baronet, desired the honour of a ten minutes' interview? It sounds well in conversation, you know, 'Sir Paul Gascoyne, one of our younger contributors—he writes those crisp little occasional reviews on the fourth page upon books of travel.' For the wise editor, who knows the world he lives in, will not despise such minor methods of indirectly establishing public confidence in the 'good form' and thorough society tone of his own particular bantling of a journal.

Well, at last the wedding-day itself arrived, and Faith, who had come up from Hillborough the night before to stop at Paul's lodgings, set out with her brother from that humble street, in the regulation coach, looking as pretty and dainty in her simple white dress as even Thistleton himself had ever seen her. They drove alone as far as the church; but when they entered, Paul was immensely surprised to see what a crowd of acquaintances

and friends the announcement in the papers had gathered together. Armitage was there, fresh back from Italy, where he had been spending the winter at Florence in the pursuit of art; and Paul couldn't help noticing the friendly way in which that arbiter of reputations nodded and smiled as Faith and he walked, tremulous, up the aisle together. The Douglasses from Oxford were there, of course, and a dozen or two of undergraduates or contemporaries of Paul's, who had rather despised the scallywag than otherwise while they were at college in his company. Isabel Boyton and her momma occupied front seats, and smiled benignly upon poor trembling Faith as she entered. The kinsman Gascoyne, of Gascoyne Manor, met them in the chancel, and shook hands warmly—a large-built, well-dressed man of military bearing and most squirarchical proportions, sufficient to strike awe by his frock-coat alone into the admiring breasts of all beholders. The Sheffield detachment was well to the fore, also strong and eager; a throng of wealthy folk, with the cutlery stamp on face and figure, craning

anxiously forward when the bride appeared, and whispering loud to one another in theatrical undertones, 'That's Sir Paul that's leading her; oh, isn't he just nice-looking!' Thistleton himself was there before them, very manly and modest in his wedding garment, and regarding Faith as she faltered up the aisle with a profound gaze of most unfeigned admiration. And everybody was pleased and good-humoured and satisfied, even Mrs. Thistleton senior being fully set at rest, the moment she set eyes on Paul's slim figure, as to the fifteenth baronet's perfect affability.

It is much more important in life always what you're called than what you are. He was just the very selfsame Paul Gascoyne as ever, but how differently now all the world regarded him!

As for Faith, when she saw the simple eager curiosity of the Sheffield folk, and their evident anxiety to catch her eye and attract her attention, her heart melted towards them at once within her. She saw in a moment they were not 'nasty rich people,' but good honest kindly folk like her-

self, with real human hearts beating hard in their bosoms.

So Faith and Thistleton were duly proclaimed man and wife by the Reverend the Rector, assisted in his arduous task by the Reverend Henry Edward Thistleton, cousin of the bridegroom. And after the ceremony was finally finished, and the books signed, and the signatures witnessed, the bridal party drove away to the hotel where Mr. Thistleton senior had commanded lunch; and there they all fraternized in unwonted style, the Master Cutler proposing the bride's health in a speech of the usual neatness and appropriateness, while Mr. Gascoyne, of Gascoyne Manor, performed the same good office for the bridegroom's constitution. And the elder Thistletons rejoiced exceedingly in the quiet dignity of the whole proceedings; and even Faith (for a woman will always be a woman still) was glad in her heart that Mr. Gascoyne, of Gascoyne Manor, had lent them for the day the countenance of his greatness, and not left them to bear alone in their orphaned poverty the burden of the baronetcy. And

in the afternoon, as the *Morning Post* next day succinctly remarked, 'the bride and bridegroom left for Dover, *en route* for Paris, Rome, and Naples,' while Sir Paul Gascoyne, fifteenth baronet, returned by himself, feeling lonely indeed, to his solitary little lodgings in the road off Gower Street.

But it had been a very bright and happy day on the whole for the National School mistress. And when Mrs. Douglas kissed he on both her cheeks, and whispered, 'My dear, I'm so glad you've married him!' Faith felt she had never before been so proud, and that Charlie was a man any girl in the world might well be proud of.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

MADAME CERIOLO had passed the winter in Italy—or, to be more precise, at Florence. Her dear friend (she wrote to Lionel Solomons), the Countess Spinelli-Feroni, had asked her to come out and stay with her as companion at her beautiful villa on the Viale dei Colli, so as to assume the place of chaperon to her accomplished daughter, Fede, now just of an age to take part as a *débutante* in the world's frivolities. The poor dear Countess herself had been paralyzed last year, and was unable to accompany that charming girl of hers, who couldn't, of course, be allowed to go out alone into the wicked world of modern Florence. So she bethought her at once of

her dear old friend, Maria Agnese Ceriolo. As a matter of fact, as everybody knows, the Spinelli-Feroni family became totally extinct about a hundred years ago; and Madame Ceriolo had been made aware of their distinguished name only by the fact that their former Palazzo, near the Ponte Santa Trinità, is at present occupied by Vieusseux's English Circulating Library. The title, however, is a sufficiently high-sounding one to command respect, and doubtless answered Madame Ceriolo's purpose quite as well as any other she could possibly have hit upon of more strictly modern and practical exactitude.

It may be acutely conjectured that a more genuine reason for the little lady's selection of her winter abode might have been found in the fact that Armitage happened to be spending that season at a hotel on the Lungarno. And Madame did not intend to lose sight of Armitage. She was thoroughly aware of that profound paradox that a professed cynic and man of the world is the safest of all marks for the matrimonial aim of the cosmopolitan adventuress. True to

her principle, however, of keeping always more than one string to her bow, she had not forgotten to despatch at the New Year a neat little card to Mr. Lionel Solomons, with the Duomo and Campanile embossed in pale monochrome in the upper left-hand corner, and 'Sinceri auguri' written across its face in breezy gold letters of most Italianesque freedom. The card was enclosed in one of Madame Ceriolo's own famous little society envelopes, with the coronet on the flap in silver and gray ; and Mr. Lionel was, indeed, a proud and happy man when he read on its back in a neat feminine hand, 'Molti anni felice.—M. A. CERIOLO.'

To be sure, Mr. Lionel knew no Italian ; but it flattered his vanity that Madame Ceriolo should take it for granted he did. Indeed, Madame Ceriolo, with her usual acuteness, had chosen to word her little message in a foreign tongue for that very reason—so accurately had she gauged Mr. Lionel's human peculiarities.

Early in March, however, Armitage had been suddenly recalled to England on un-

expected business, reaching London by mere chance in time to be present at Thistleton's marriage with Faith Gascoyne. So Madame Ceriolo, having nothing further to detain her now in Italy, and being anxious not to let Mr. Lionel languish too long uncheered by her sunny presence—for man is fickle and London is large—decided to return with the first April swallows, after Browning's receipt, to dear, dingy Old England. She stopped for a night or two on her way in Brussels, to be sure, with a member of her distinguished aristocratic family (just then engaged as a scene-shifter at the Théâtre Royal); but by the morning of the fifth she was comfortably settled once more at the Hôtel de l'Univers, and had made Mr. Lionel aware of her serene presence by a short little note couched in the simplest terms: 'Back in London at last. This minute arrived. When may I hope to see you? *Toute à vous de cœur.*—M. A. CERIOLO.'

Mr. Lionel read that admirably-worded note ten times over to himself—it said so much because it said so little; then he

folded it up with his fat, short fingers and placed it next his heart, in his bank-note pocket. He was a man of sentiment in his way, as well as of business, was Mr. Lionel Solomons, and the Ceriolo was undoubtedly a devilish fine woman. It was not nothing that a countess should write to him thus on her own initialled and coronetted notepaper. A countess in distress is still always a countess. And '*Toute à vous de cœur*,' too! Mr. Lionel was not learned in foreign tongues, but so much at least of the French language his Ollendorffian studies permitted him readily to translate. He hugged himself with delight as he rolled those dainty words on his mind's tongue once more. '*Toute à vous de cœur*' she wrote to him; a devilish fine woman, and a born countess.

It was with infinite impatience that Mr. Lionel endured the routine work of the office in the City that day. His interest in the wobbling of Consols flagged visibly, and even the thrilling news that Portuguese Threes had declined one-eighth, to $53\frac{3}{4}-\frac{5}{8}$ for the account, failed to rouse for the moment his languid enthusiasm. He bore with

equanimity the boom in Argentines, and seemed hardly inclined to attach sufficient importance to the probable effect of the Servian crisis on the doubtful value of Roumanian and Bulgarian securities. All day long, in fact, he was moody and pre-occupied; and more than once, when nobody else was looking, he drew from the pocket nearest his heart a tiny square of cream-laid note, on which he once more devoured those intoxicating words, '*Toute à vous de cœur.*—M. A. CERIOLO.'

In the evening, as soon as the office closed, Mr. Lionel indulged himself in the unwonted luxury of a hansom cab—he more usually swelled the dividends of the Metropolitan Railway—and hurried home post-haste to his own rooms to make himself beautiful with hair-oil and a sprig of Roman hyacinth. (Roman hyacinth, relieved with two sprays of pink bouvardia, suited Mr. Lionel's complexion to a T, and could be purchased cheap towards nightfall, to prevent loss by fading, from the florist's round the corner.) He was anxious to let no delay stand in the way of his visit to Madame

Ceriolo's *salon*. Had not Madame herself written to him, 'This minute arrived'? and should he, the happy swain thus honoured by the fair, show himself unworthy of her marked *empressement*?

So as soon as he had arrayed his rotund person in its most expensive and becoming apparel (as advertised, four and a half guineas), he hastened down, by hansom once more, to the Hôtel de l'Univers.

Madame Ceriolo received him, metaphorically speaking, with open arms. To have done so literally would, in Madame's opinion, have been bad play. Her policy was to encourage attentions in not too liberal or generous a spirit. By holding off a little at first in the expression of your emotion you draw them on in the end all the more ardently and surely.

And Madame Ceriolo felt decidedly now the necessity for coming to the point with Lionel Solomons. The testimony of her mirror compelled her to admit that she was no longer so young as she had been twenty years ago. To be sure, she was well preserved — remarkably well preserved—and

even almost without making up (for Madame Ceriolo relied as little as possible, after all, upon the dangerous and doubtful aid of cosmetics) she was still an undeniably fresh and handsome little woman. Her easygoing life, and the zest with which she entered into all amusements, had combined with a naturally strong and lively constitution to keep the wrinkles from her brow, the colour in her cheeks, and the agreeable roundness in her well - turned figure. Nevertheless, Madame Ceriolo was fully aware that all this could not last for ever. Her exchequer was low—uncomfortably low; she had succeeded in making but little at Florence out of play or bets—the latter arranged on the simple principle of accepting when she won, and smiling when she lost, in full discharge of all obligations. Armitage had circled round her like a moth round the candle, but had managed to get away in the end without singeing his wings. Madame Ceriolo sighed a solemn sigh of pensive regret as she concluded that she must decline for the present, at least, upon Lionel Solomons.

Not that she had the very slightest idea

of passing the whole remainder of her earthly pilgrimage in that engaging young person's intimate society. Folly of such magnitude would never even have occurred in her wildest moment to Madame Ceriolo's well-balanced and well-regulated intellect. Her plan was merely to suck Mr. Lionel quite dry, and then to fling him away under circumstances where he could be of no further possible inconvenience or annoyance to her. And to this intent Madame Ceriolo had gradually concocted at Florence—in the intervals of extracting five-franc pieces by slow doles from some impoverished Tuscan count or marchese—a notable scheme which she was now in course of putting into actual execution. She had returned to London resolved to 'fetch' Mr. Lionel Solomons or to perish in the attempt, and she proceeded forthwith in characteristic style to the task of 'fetching' him.

In the shabby little *salon* everything was as neat as neat could be when Mr. Lionel entered to salute his charmer. A bouquet—presented that day by another admirer—stood upon the table by the sofa in the

corner, where Madame Ceriolo herself lay in the half-light, her lamp just judiciously shaded from above, and the folds of her becoming, soft-coloured tea-gown arranged around her plump figure with the most studied carelessness. As Lionel approached, Madame Ceriolo held out both her hands in welcome, without rising from her seat or decomposing her dress.

‘How nice of you to come so soon!’ she cried, pressing either fat palm with dexterously-adjusted pressure. ‘So long since we’ve met! And I thought of you at Florence. Even among those delicious Fra Angelicos, and Lippis, and Andreas, and Della Robbias, I often longed to be back in England, among *all* my friends. For, after all, I love England best. I sometimes say to her, With all thy virtues—thy Philistine, obtrusive, hypocritical virtues—England, with all thy virtues, I love thee still!’

Mr. Lionel was charmed. What wit! what playfulness! He sat down and talked, with a vague idea of being a thorough man of the world, about Florence and Italy, and all Madame Ceriolo had seen and done since

he last set eyes on her, till he half imagined himself as cosmopolitan as she was. Indeed, he had once run across (when business was slack) for a fortnight to Paris, and made acquaintance with the Continent in the *cafés chantants* of the Champs Elysées in that seductive metropolis, so that he almost felt competent to discuss the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace, or to enlarge upon St. Mark's and Milan Cathedral, with as much glib readiness as Madame Ceriolo herself could do. As for Madame, she humoured him to the very top of his bent.

‘Ah, what a pity it is, Mr. Solomons!’ she exclaimed at last, gazing across at him with a look which was intended to convey the ill-concealed admiration of a simple but all too-trusting heart, ‘what a pity it is that *you*, with your high instincts and aspirations—*you*, who would so much enjoy and appreciate all these lovely things, should be condemned to pass all your youth—your golder youth—in moiling and toiling after the pursuit of wealth in that dreadful City!’

‘Well, the City ain’t so bad, after all,’ Mr. Lionel answered deprecatingly, but with a

self-satisfied smirk. 'There's lots of fun, too, to be had in the City, I can tell you.'

'That's true,' Madame Ceriolo answered, beaming upon him angelically; 'oh, so very true—for you who say it! Of course, when one's young, everywhere has its delights. Why, I love even this dear old dingy London. At our age, naturally, the universe at large ought to be full of interest for us. But, still, I often think to myself, What a terrible thing it is—how badly this world we live in is organized! It's the old who have all the world's money in their hands. It's the young who want it and who ought to have it.'

'Just my notion to a T,' Mr. Lionel answered briskly, gazing at the enchantress with open eyes. 'That's exactly what I stick at. Where's the good of the tin, I always say, to a lot of helpless and hopeless old mumbling cripples?'

'Quite so,' Madame Ceriolo continued, watching his face closely. 'What a capital principle it would be, now, if Nature made all of us drop off satisfied, at sixty or thereabouts, like leeches when they're full, and

leave all our hoarded wealth to be used and enjoyed by those who have still the spirit to enjoy it !

‘ Instead of which,’ Mr. Lionel put in with a prompt air of acquiescence, ‘ one’s relations always go living and living and living on, on purpose to spite one, till eighty-five or ninety!’

‘ Keeping the young people out of their own so long!’ Madame Ceriolo echoed, to pursue the pregnant train of thought uninterruptedly. ‘ Yes, that’s just where it is. It’s a natural injustice. Now, when I was out over there in Florence, for example, I thought to myself—I can’t tell you how often (forgive me if I confess it): Suppose only Lionel Solomons could be here with me too—you’ll pardon me, won’t you, for thinking of you to myself as Lionel Solomons?—how much more he’d enjoy this delightful, charming Italian life, with its freedom and its unconventionality, its sunshine and its carnival, than the dreary, dismal, foggy world of London!’

‘ No, did you really, though?’ Lionel cried, open-mouthed. ‘ I’m sure that was awfully good and kind of you, Madame!’

‘And then I thought to myself,’ Madame Ceriolo went on, closing her eyes ecstatically, ‘one afternoon in the Cascine, when the sun was shining, and the band was playing, and a crowd of young Italian noblemen were pressing round our carriage—Countess Spinelli-Feroni’s carriage, you know, where Fede and I were sitting and chatting with them—it came upon me suddenly, as I looked around and missed you: How happy dear Lionel Solomons would be in such a world as this, if only——’ She broke off and paused significantly.

‘If only what?’ Mr. Lionel asked with an ogle of delight.

‘If only that rich uncle of his, old Cento-Cento down yonder at Hillborough, were to do his duty like a man and pop off the hooks at once, now there’s no further need or use in the world any longer for him.’

‘Old what?’ Mr. Lionel inquired, not catching the name exactly.

‘Old Cento-Cento,’ Madame Ceriolo answered with a beaming smile. ‘That’s what I always call your respected uncle in Italian to myself. A hundred per cent. it means,

you know, in English. I usually think of him in my own mind as old Cento-Cento.'

Mr. Lionel hardly knew whether to be annoyed or not. 'He don't ask more than other people do for the same accommodation,' he objected half grumpily.

'No, doesn't he, though?' Madame Ceriolo replied, with the infantile smile of a simple marble cherub. 'Well, I'm sorry for that; for I thought he was laying by a nice round sum for somebody else to enjoy hereafter. And for somebody else's sake I think I could forgive even rank usury to old Cento-Cento. He might behave like a perfect Shylock if he liked, provided only it redounded in the end to somebody else's benefit.'

Mr. Lionel's face relaxed once more. 'Well, there's something in that,' he answered, mollified.

'*Something* in that!' the enchantress echoed with a little start of surprise; 'why, there's a great deal in that. There's everything in that--Lionel.' She paused a moment as she let the name glide half reluctantly off her tongue. 'For your sake,' she went on, letting her eyelashes fall with a drooping

languor, expressive of feminine reserve and timidity, 'I almost fancy I could forgive him anything, except his perversity in living for ever. How old is he now, Lionel ?'

'Sixty-something,' the younger Mr. Solomons answered ruefully.

'And he may go on living to all eternity !' Madame Ceriolo cried, excited. 'When I say "to all eternity," I mean for twenty years—at our age a perfectly endless period. Oh, Lionel, think how much enjoyment you might get out of that old man's money, if only—if only my plan for dropping off at sixty had met with the approbation of the authorities of the universe !'

'It's very good of you to interest yourself so much in my happiness,' Mr. Lionel said, melting, and gazing at her fondly.

'Whatever interests you interests me, Lionel,' Madame Ceriolo answered truthfully, for she meant to make what was his hers, and she gazed back at him languishing.

Flesh and blood could stand it no longer. Mr. Lionel was composed of those familiar human histological elements. Leaning over the daughter of Tyrolese aristocracy, he

seized Madame Ceriolo's hand, which half resisted, half yielded, in his own. In a fervour of young love even Mr. Lionel could be genuinely carried away by the tender passion — he lifted it to his lips. The Countess, in distress, permitted him to impress upon it one burning kiss. Then she snatched it away, tremulously, like one who feels conscious of having allowed her feelings to get the better of her judgment in a moment of weakness. 'No, no,' she exclaimed faintly; 'not that, not that, Lionel!'

'And why not?' Mr. Lionel asked, bending over her, all eagerness.

'Because,' the Countess in distress answered with a deep-drawn sigh, 'I am too, too weak. It can never be. I can never, never burden you.'

Mr. Lionel had hardly before reflected with seriousness upon the question whether he desired to be burdened with Madame Ceriolo as a partner for life or not; but thus suddenly put upon his mettle, he forgot to reason with himself as to the wisdom of his course; he forgot to pause for committee of supply; he forgot to debate the pros and

cons of the state of matrimony ; he retained sense enough merely to pour forth his full soul in unpremeditated strains of passionate pleading, as conceived in the East Central postal district. He flung himself figuratively at Madame Ceriolo's feet. He laid his heart and hand at Madame Ceriolo's footstool. He grovelled in the dust before Madame Ceriolo's throne. He begged Madame Ceriolo at all risks and hazards to make him the happiest of mankind at once and for ever.

And being human after all, he meant it all as he said it ; he meant it every word, without deduction or discount. She was a devilish fine woman, and she intoxicated him with her presence.

But Madame Ceriolo, with difficulty preserving her womanly dignity and trembling all over with profound regret, reluctantly declined the proffered anatomical specimens. His heart and hand she must perforce deny herself. ' Oh no,' she answered ; ' Lionel, dear Lionel, it can never be ! Weak as I am, for your sake, I must steel myself. What have I to offer you in return for your love ? Nothing but the bare shadow of a

noble name—an empty title—a useless coronet. I won't burden any further your youth that ought to be so free—while the uncle lives. If old Cento-Cento were to be gathered to his fathers now, or were to see his way to making you a proper allowance—perhaps—in time—— But as it is—impossible! I won't even wait for you: I won't let you wait for me. Let us both be free. . . . I, at least, will never make any use of my freedom!

Mr. Lionel rose and paced the *salon*. 'You won't have long to wait,' he exclaimed, strange thoughts surging within him. 'Marie—may I call you Marie?—oh, thank you! I swear it.'

Madame Ceriolo dropped back upon her cushions in admirable alarm. 'Oh, Lionel,' she cried, all aghast at his boldness, 'whatever you do, whatever you mean, for my sake be prudent!'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PLAN PROGRESSES.

WHEN Lionel Solomons left the Hôtel de l'Univers that evening, at a very late hour, Madame Ceriolo lay back on her cushions with a smiling face and laughed low to herself. 'Booked!' she murmured under her breath, much amused. 'Distinctly booked! I've only got to play him carefully now, and my fish is landed!' For Madame Ceriolo was not such a purist in her metaphors as many distinguished critics would wish us all to be. She thought in the natural terms of everyday humanity, not in the forced language pedants would fain impose upon us. *They* would have insisted upon it that she must have said to herself 'hooked!' not 'booked!' in order to guard against a mixture

of metaphors. Only, unfortunately, as a matter of fact, being human, she didn't.

But Mr. Lionel went home much perturbed in soul. He had let himself in for Madame Ceriolo in real earnest now, and he must face the difficulty he had himself created in his own path through life. Money must be found somehow; money, money, money, if possible, by fair means; but if those failed, then otherwise.

Not that Mr. Lionel repented him of his choice. She was a devilish fine woman and a real countess. Her notepaper was stamped with an indubitable coronet. She knew the world, and could open the way for him into society he had never as yet even dreamed of attempting. She could help him to take down that prig Gascoyne, who sadly wanted taking down a peg or two. Nothing could be nicer—if only it were practicable. But there came the rub. If only it were practicable!

And the next three weeks were wholly spent by Mr. Lionel Solomons in trying to think how he could make it all possible.

During those few weeks he saw much, it

need hardly be said, of Madame Ceriolo. The Countess in distress, having once decided upon her course of action, had no intention of letting the grass grow under her feet. Her plan was to strike while the iron was hot. The fish must be landed without delay. So she devoted her by no means inconsiderable talents to the congenial task of gently suggesting to Lionel Solomons her own preconceived solution of her own created problem.

She didn't let Lionel see she was suggesting it, of course. Oh dear no; Madame was far too clever and too cautious for that. To propose, however remotely, that he should do anything dishonourable for her own dear sake would be inartistic and disenchanting. The Countess in distress played her cards more cleverly. She only made him feel, by obscure innuendoes and ingenious half-hints, how admirable a thing it would be in the abstract if the money that lay in Mr. Solomon's safe could be transferred without difficulty to the bottom of his nephew's waistcoat-pocket. Madame Ceriolo had no intention, indeed, of mixing up her own un-

sullied name with any doubtful transactions in the matter of the proposed readjustment of securities. She avoided all appearance of evil with religious avoidance. During a longer course of life than she cared to admit even to her own looking-glass, she had carefully kept outside the law-courts of her country. She hadn't the slightest idea of entering them now. If swindling must be done, let others swindle; 'twas hers to batten innocently on the booty of the swindled. Her cue was to urge on Mr. Lionel by vague suggestions that suggested nothing—to let him think he was planning the whole thing himself, when, in reality, he was going blindfolded whither his charmer led him.

Nor was it part of her design, either, to commit herself unreservedly to Mr. Lionel for any lengthened period. She saw in him a considerable temporary convenience, whose pickings might even be judiciously applied to the more secure capture of Armitage, or some other equally eligible person, in the remoter future. Funds were necessary for the further prosecution of the campaign of life; Mr. Lionel might well consider him-

self flattered in being selected as the instrument for supplying the sinews of war for the time being to so distinguished a strategist.

So Madame Ceriolo contrived to spread her net wide, and to entangle her young admirer artfully within its cunning coils.

It was a Sunday in autumn—that next succeeding autumn—and Madame lolled once more upon those accustomed cushions. To loll suited the Ceriolo figure; it suggested most amply the native voluptuousness of the Ceriolo charms.

‘Zébie,’ Madame Ceriolo called out to her faithful attendant, ‘put away those flowers into my bedroom, will you? They are the Armitage’s, and the Armitage must be sternly ignored. Set the ugly little Jew’s bouquet here by my side. And listen, imbecile; don’t go grinning like that. I expect the little Jew himself to drop in this afternoon. Entends-tu donc, stupide? The ugly little Jew, I tell you, is coming. Show him up at once, the minute he arrives, and for the rest, whoever comes, “Madame ne reçoit pas aujourd’hui;” now, do you hear me, image?’

‘Oui, Madame,’ Eusébie answered with imperturbable good-humour. ‘Though I should think Madame ought almost to have cleared out the little Jew by this time.’

‘Zébie,’ Madame answered with a not unflattered smile, ‘you meddle too much. You positively presume. I shall have to speak of your conduct, I fear, to the patron. You are of an impertinence—oh, of an impertinence! What is it to you why I receive this gentleman? His attentions are strictly *pour le bon motif*. Were it otherwise——’ Madame leaned back on her cushions and composed her face with profound gravity into the severest imitation of the stern British matron. ‘Go, Zébie,’ she continued. ‘This levity surprises me. Besides, I rather think I hear—*on sonne*. Go down and bring him up. It’s the ugly little Jew—I know his footstep.’

‘Lionel!’ Madame Ceriolo was exclaiming a moment later, her left palm pressed unobtrusively about the region of her heart, to still its beating, and her right extended with effusion to greet him. ‘I hardly expected

you would come to-day! A pleasure unexpected is doubly pleasant. Sit down, dear heart'—in German this last—'let me take a good look at you now. So delighted to see you!'

Mr. Lionel sat down, and twirled his hat. His charmer gazed at him, but he hardly heeded her. He talked for some minutes with a preoccupied air. Madame Ceriolo didn't fail to note that some more important subject than the weather and the theatre, on both which he touched in passing with light lips, engrossed his soul. But she waited patiently. She let him go on, and went on herself, as becomes young love, with these minor matters.

'And so *Mignonette* was good?' she said, throwing volumes into her glance. 'I'm sorry I wasn't able to go with you myself. That box *was* a temptation. But I think, you know, so long as nothing definite can be arranged between us,' and she sighed gently, 'it's best I shouldn't be seen with you too much in public. A woman, and especially a woman *qui court le monde toute seule*, can't be too careful, you see, to avoid

being talked about. If only for *your* sake, Lionel, I can't be too careful.'

Mr. Lionel twirled his hat more violently than ever.

'Well, that's just what I've come to talk to you about, Marie,' he said with some awkwardness—though he called her plain Marie quite naturally now. '“So long as nothing definite can be arranged between us,” you say. Well, there it is, you see; I want to put things at last upon a definite basis. The question is, Are you or are you not prepared to trust yourself implicitly to my keeping?'

The Countess in distress started with a well-designed start.

'Oh, Lionel,' she cried, like a girl of sixteen, 'do you really, really, really mean it?'

'Yes, I really mean it,' Mr. Lionel answered, much flattered at her youthful emotion. 'I've worked it all out, and I think I do see my way clear before me in essentials at last. But before I take any serious step I wish you'd allow me to explain at full to you.'

'No, no!' Madame Ceriolo answered,

clapping her hands on her ears and turning upon him with a magnificent burst of feminine weakness and trustfulness. 'I'd rather not hear. I'd rather know nothing. It's quite enough for me if you say you can do it. I don't want to be told how. I don't want to ask why. I feel sure you could do nothing untrue or dishonourable. I'm content if you tell me you have solved our problem.'

And, indeed, as a matter of fact, it suited Madame Ceriolo's book best to be able to plead entire ignorance of Mr. Lionel's doings, in case that imprudent young gentleman should ever happen to find himself face to face with a criminal prosecution. She knew the chances of the game too well. She preferred to pose rather as dupe than as accomplice.

Lionel Solomons winced a little at that painfully suggestive clause, 'untrue or dishonourable,' but for all that he kept his own counsel.

'At any rate,' he went on more cautiously, 'whatever I did, Marie, I hope and trust you wouldn't be angry with me?'

'*Angry with you?*' the Ceriolo echoed in a blank tone of surprise. '*Angry with you, Lionel! Impossible! Incredible! Inconceivable! How could I be? Whatever you did and whatever you dared would be right, to me, dearest one. However the world might judge it, I at least would understand and appreciate your motives. I would know that your love, your love for me, sanctified and excused whatever means you might be compelled to adopt for my sake, Lionel!*'

The young man leant forward and pressed that plump hand tenderly. 'Then you'll forgive me,' he said, 'whatever I may risk for you?'

'Everything,' Madame Ceriolo answered with innocent trust, 'provided you don't explain to me and ask me beforehand. I have perfect confidence in your wisdom and your honour.' And as she said the last words, she looked up in his face with a guileless look that quite took him captive. For guileless as it was, Lionel Solomons somehow felt in his heart of hearts that Madame Ceriolo, in the most delicate and graceful manner possible, had mentally winked at him. And

the consciousness of that infantile implied wink set him quite at his ease on moral grounds, at any rate.

‘We shall have to leave England,’ he went on after a brief pause, during which his siren had been steadily transfixing him with those liquid eyes of hers.

‘That’s nothing to me,’ Madame responded passionately, in soft, low tones. ‘Where those I love are with me, there is my home. Besides, all Europe is pretty much the same to a woman who has travelled as long as I have done.’ She sighed once more. ‘I’ve been buffeted about the world,’ she went on, with a pathetic cadence, ‘in many strange places—Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain—it’s all one to me.’

‘Spain won’t do, though,’ Mr. Lionel responded briskly, half letting out his secret in the candour of private life (as encouraged by Madame). ‘Spain’s played out, they say. No good any longer. A man’s no safer there since the last treaty than anywhere else on the Continent.’

‘I don’t *quite* understand you,’ Madame went on, once more, with that infantile smile

repeated for his benefit, half as a wink and half as a warning. 'We shall be safe wherever we go, dear heart, if we're true to one another. Spain would be as good as anywhere else, Lionel.'

'Well, I don't mean to go there, anyhow,' Mr. Lionel rejoined with prudent vagueness. 'Marie—can you follow me—across the broad Atlantic?'

The Ceriolo gave a start of pleased surprise.

Nothing on earth would suit her plans so well. It was she herself who, by dexterous remarks, *à propos des bottes*, had first put into his head the notion of South America as a possible place of refuge from impertinent inquiry. But he didn't know that himself; he thought he had hit upon it all of his own mere notion. And he waited anxiously after playing this very doubtful card; while Madame, pretending to be taken aback with astonishment, turned it over in her own mind with sudden lovesick infatuation.

'With you, Lionel,' she cried, seizing his hand in hers, and pressing it to her lips

ecstatically, 'I could go to the world's end—anywhere—everywhere!'

And, indeed, if it came to that, the nearer the world's end she got, the easier it would be for her to leave Mr. Lionel in the lurch as soon as she was done with him. In Paris or Madrid he might get in her way in the end and defeat her purpose; but in Rio or Buenos Ayres he would be harmless to hurt her, when, the orange once sucked dry, she turned her wandering bark anew towards the lodestar of London in search of Armitage.

'Thank you,' Mr. Lionel said with warmth, and embraced her tenderly.

'Will it be New York?' Madame Ceriolo asked, gazing up at him yet again with infinite trustfulness. 'Or do you prefer Philadelphia?'

'Well, neither, Marie,' Mr. Lionel answered, fearing once more he might rouse suspicion or disgust in that innocent bosom. 'I think—the—peculiar circumstances under which we must sail will compel our port to be Buenos Ayres.'

'That's a long way off,' Madame mused

resignedly—a very long way off indeed. But where *you* are, Lionel, I shall be happy for ever.'

The unfortunate young dupe endeavoured to hedge. Madame Ceriolo was forcing his hand too fast.

'Well, I don't say yet I've made up my mind to go,' he continued hastily. 'There are contingencies that may occur which might easily prevent it. If my uncle——'

Madame Ceriolo clapped her hand promptly upon his mouth.

'Not one word,' she exclaimed with fervour, 'about old Cento-Cento. He's a bad old man not to make things easier for you. It's a sin and a shame you shouldn't be able to come into your own and live comfortably without expatriation. I won't hear the ancient wretch's name so much as uttered in my presence. When you've finally emigrated, and we settle down on your quiet little farm in South America for life, I shall write to the old horror and just tell him what I think of him.'

'Oh no, you won't,' Mr. Lionel interposed hastily.

‘Oh yes, I will,’ Madame Ceriolo persisted, all smiles.

Mr. Lionel glanced across at her in doubt once more. Was she really so childishly innocent as she seemed? Or was she only doing it all just to keep up appearances? He was almost half afraid she really meant what she said. For a moment he faltered. Was it safe, after all, to run away with this guileless creature?

Madame Ceriolo read the passing doubt in his eye. And she answered it characteristically. She drew out from her pocket a little packet of thin rice-paper and a pouch of delicately scented Russian tobacco.

‘Let me roll you a cigarette,’ she said, peering deep into his eyes. Her gaze was full of unspeakable comprehension.

‘Thanks,’ he answered. And she proceeded to roll it. How deftly those plump but dainty little fingers did their familiar work! He watched and admired. What a magical charm, to be sure, that fawn-eyed Countess carried about with her! He took the cigarette from her hands, and she held the match herself to him. Then she went

on to roll a second for herself. As soon as it was finished she placed it jauntily between those rich red lips and lighted it from his. How their eyes met and darted contagious fire as she puffed and drew in at two cigarettes' length of distance between their faces ! Then Madame leaned back on the pillows and puffed away, not vigorously, but with languid and long-drawn enjoyment. Lionel had seen her smoke so a dozen times before ; but this time the action had a special significance for him. She smoked like a woman to the manner born. How impossible to conceive that a person who handled her cigarette like that could be quite so blindly innocent as his charmer pretended to be.

And if not so innocent, then, why, hang it all ! what a clever little actress and schemer she was ! How admirably she let him see, without one incriminating word ever passing between them, that she knew and approved exactly what he intended !

‘ So we understand one another ? ’ he asked, leaning over her all intoxicated.

And Madame, pausing to blow out a long slow current of thin blue smoke between her

pursed-up lips, answered at last, gazing hard once more into the depths of his eyes :

‘ We understand one another perfectly. Make what arrangements you choose, and take your passage when you like. I am only yours. What day do you fix ?’

‘ For—the ceremony?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Saturday.’

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PLAN IN ACTION.

To finish all needful preparations by Saturday was very hard work indeed ; but having plighted his troth thus hastily to lady fair—as fair as pearl powder and *crème de Ninon* could make her—Mr. Lionel Solomons would have been loath in heart to fail her at a pinch, and he strained every nerve accordingly to complete his arrangements by the date agreed upon.

And yet there was a great deal, a very great deal, to do meanwhile. Let alone certain important but doubtful elements in the case, which Madame Ceriolo in her prudence would not so much as permit to be named before her, other more prosaic and ordinary preparations had still to be per-

formed, as per Act of Parliament in that case made and provided. There was the paternal blessing of the most Reverend Father in God, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to be obtained for this propitious union, on a piece of stamped paper duly sealed and delivered ; for Madame Ceriolo, true to her principles to the last, intended to be married with all proper solemnities to Mr. Lionel Solomons, in a building legally set apart for the solemnization of matrimony, in accordance with the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England as by law established. No Registrar's office or hole-and-corner proceedings of doubtful respectability would suit Madame's delicate sense of the becoming in these profound matters ; she must be married, if at all, by special license, and according to the rites of that Church in which, as she often remarked, her dear mamma's father had formerly been a distinguished and respected dignitary. To be sure, once tied to Mr. Lionel Solomons by this stringent bond, there might be difficulties in the way of getting rid of him hereafter ; but, like a wise woman, Madame resolved to take short views and

chance them. It's better to be decently married even to a man you mean to suck dry and desert when completely drained, than to create a scandal. A separation between married folks is nowadays almost fashionable, and certainly not under the ban of the omnipotent Mrs. Grundy. And who knows what becomes of a beggared man in Buenos Ayres? Madame Ceriolo trusted to the noble modern principle of natural selection to improve Mr. Lionel shortly off the face of the earth in those remote parts; and at any rate she felt sure she was doing the very best possible for herself at present in marrying him.

Mr. Lionel, for his part, showed unwonted energy in getting everything ready beforehand for that eventful Saturday. After procuring his license, and securing his berths, and engaging his parson, and making his way in every respect clear before him, he ran down, at last, on the Thursday of that eventful week to Hillborough. Everything depended now on the success of his visit. If he could succeed in what he wanted, all would be well; if not, he would have the mortification and

chagrin on Saturday of confessing to the Ceriola a complete fiasco.

On the way down, the South-Eastern Railway Company's suburban train, making its wonted pace, gave Mr. Lionel in his comfortable smoking-compartment ample time for meditation and reflection. And Mr. Lionel, turning all things quietly over with himself, came to the conclusion, in cold blood, that after all he was doing the very best thing for himself in thus anticipating his uncle's testamentary dispositions. Mr. Solomons the elder had frequently explained to him that all the money he had ground out of the Gascoynes and all his other clients by slow process was intended in the end, wholly and solely, for Mr. Lionel's own personal use and benefit.

'It's all for your sake I do it, Leo,' Mr. Solomons had said to him deprecatingly more than once. 'It's all for you that I slave and hoard and wear myself out without getting any reasonable return in life for it.'

And in a certain sense Mr. Lionel knew that was true. His uncle made and hoarded money, to be sure, because to make and hoard

money was the instinct of his kind ; but Mr. Lionel was the conscious end in view for which as immediate object he made and hoarded it. Still, Mr. Lionel reflected to himself in his unprejudiced way, what was the good of money to a man of fifty ? And if Uncle Judah went on living for ever, as one might expect, in spite of his heart (for creaking doors last long), he, Lionel, would be certainly fifty or thereabouts before he had the slightest chance of touching one penny of it. It was absurd of a man to toil and slave for his nephew's sake and then keep that nephew out of his own indefinitely. Mr. Lionel was prepared to relieve Uncle Judah from the onus of that illogical and untenable situation ; he was prepared to carry out his uncle's implied desire in a manner more intelligent and more directly sensible than his uncle contemplated.

At any time of his life, indeed, he would have thought the same ; he had often thought it before, though he had never dared to act upon it. But the great use of a woman in this world is that she supplies an efficient stimulus to action. Madame Ceriolo's clever

and well-directed hints had rendered actual these potential impulses of Lionel's. She had urged him forward to do as he thought ; to take time by the forelock, and realize at once his uncle's savings. He was prepared now to discount his future fortune—at a modest percentage ; to take at once what would in any case be his on his uncle's death, for an immediate inheritance.

At fifty, of what use would it be to himself and his Countess ? And what worlds of fun they could get out of it nowadays !

Madame Ceriolo, indeed, had for many weeks been carefully instilling that simple moral by wide generalizations and harmless copybook maxims into his receptive soul ; and the seed she sowed had fallen on strictly appropriate soil, and, springing up well, was now to bring forth fruit in vigorous action. A man, Madame had assured him more than once, should wisely plan and boldly execute ; and having attained his end, should sit down in peace under his own vine and fig-tree to rest and enjoy himself. None but the brave deserve the fair ; and when the brave had risked much for the sake of a Countess in

distress, she must be cruel indeed if, after that, she found it in her heart to blame or upbraid him.

So Mr. Lionel sped slowly on his way southward, well satisfied in soul that he was doing the best in the end for himself and his charmer, and little trembling for the success of his vigorous plan of action.

When he reached Hillborough and his uncle's office, he found Mr. Solomons very red in the face with suppressed excitement from a recent passage-at-arms with the local attorney.

'That fellow Wilkie wanted to cheat me out of two and fourpence costs, Leo,' Mr. Solomons exclaimed indignantly, in explanation of his ruffled temper and his suffused cheeks; 'but I wouldn't stand *that*, you know; I've had it out with him fairly, and I don't think he'll try it on with *me* a second time, the low pettifogging creature.'

'It's made you precious pink about the gills, any way,' Mr. Lionel retorted with cheerful sympathy, seating himself lazily in the easy-chair and gazing up at his uncle's rotund face and figure. And, indeed, Mr.

Solomons was very flushed—flushed, his nephew observed, with a certain deep blue lividness around the lips and eyes which often indicates the later stages of heart-disease. Certain qualms of conscience rose that moment in Mr. Lionel's soul. Was he going to render himself liable to criminal proceedings, then, all for nothing? If he waited a few weeks, or months, or seasons, would the pear drop ripe from the branch of its own accord? Was he anticipating Nature dangerously when, if he held on in quiet a little longer, Nature herself would bring him his inheritance? These were practical questions that Mr. Lionel's conscience could readily understand, while on more abstract planes, perhaps, it would have been deaf as an adder. Uncle Judah's heart was clearly getting very much the worse for wear. He might pop off any day. Why seek to get by foul means what would be his in time by fair, if only he cared to watch and wait for it?

Pshaw! It was too late for such squeamishness now. With the Archbishop of Canterbury's blessing in his desk, and the

Royal Mail Steam Company's receipt for berths per steamship *Dom Pedro* to Buenos Ayres direct in his trousers - pocket, he couldn't turn back at the eleventh hour and await contingencies. Threatened men live long. It's no good counting upon heart-disease ; the very worst hearts go beating on for years and years with most annoying regularity. Besides, what would Marie say if he returned to town and told her lamely that his plans had fallen through, and that he must decline to marry her, as per agreement arranged on Saturday morning ? When you've made up your mind to wed the charmer who has enslaved your heart at the week's end you can't put her off on Thursday afternoon at two days' notice. Come what might now, he must pull this thing through. He must carry out his plan as settled upon at all hazard.

‘ I'm glad you've come, though, Leo,’ Mr. Solomons replied, putting his necktie straight and endeavouring to compose his ruffled temper. ‘ I've a great many things I want to talk over with you. I'd like your advice about sundry securities I hold in my hands.

Especially as to selling those Central Southern Railway Debentures.'

Mr. Lionel's eyes glistened as his uncle rose ten minutes later, after some further parley on business matters, and went over to the safe where the papers which represented his wealth were duly pigeon-holed. How pat! How opportune! He had fallen on his feet indeed: this was precisely the exact chance he needed. Mr. Solomons drew out the various securities one by one, and discussed with loving cadences their different values. 'All yours, all yours, Leo, my dear,' he murmured more than once, as he fingered them gingerly. 'You'll be a rich man, Leo, when you come into your own. Gas and Coke Company's A's yield 12 per cent. to original investors, of which I was one. Twelve per cent. is very good interest as times go nowadays on that class of security; excellent interest. No risk, no difficulty; nothing to do but to sit in your easy-chair, with your legs in the air, and draw your dividends. Not my style of business, you know, Leo; too slow for me. I like something that gives me good returns

and close pickings, and some fun for one's money ; but for your sake, my dear boy, I like to have a little reserve-fund put away safely. It's better than all these speculative investments after all, Leo.'

'Certainly,' Mr. Lionel assented with promptitude. 'Something that can be called in and realized at any moment. Something one can turn into ready cash on the open Stock Exchange whenever it's needed. Whereas, with most of your money-lending transactions, you see, you never know where you are—like that beastly Gascoyne business, for example. Money sunk in a hole, that's what I call it.'

'What's that?' Mr. Solomons interposed sharply, looking round over his shoulder, alarmed at the sound of those ominous words, 'realized at any moment.' 'Money sunk in a hole! Nothing of the sort, I give you my word, Leo. Here's the papers all as straight and businesslike as possible ; and he's paying interest monthly ; he's paying interest at the rate of twenty per cent. per annum with the greatest regularity. Sir Paul Gascoyne, Bart., is an honourable party.'

Mr. Lionel continued to turn over the bonds, and noted carefully where each was pigeon-holed. 'You haven't had these out,' he said with a casual air, observing the dust upon them, 'since I was down here last. I see they're just as I put them back myself last time.'

'Well, I don't go to the safe, not twice in a twelvemonth, except when coupons fall due,' his uncle answered unconcerned, as he fingered once more the Gascoyne notes of hand with that loving, lingering touch of his. 'It's best not to meddle with these things too often, Leo. They might get lying about loose, and be mislaid or stolen.'

'Quite so,' Mr. Lionel answered dryly, retreating to a seat, and running his fat hand easily through his oily locks while he regarded the safe from afar on his chair in the corner with profound interest. It suited his game, in fact, that Mr. Solomons should visit it as seldom as possible. Suppose by any chance certain securities should happen to be mislaid in the course of the next week or so—now, for example—it might

be Christmas or thereabouts before Mr. Solomons so much as even missed them.

As they loitered about and talked over the question of the Central Southern Debentures, Mr. Solomons' boy from the office below poked his head into the room and announced briefly, 'Mr. Barr to see you, sir.'

'I must run down, Leo,' Mr. Solomons said, glancing about him with a hasty eye at the bonds and debentures. 'Barr and Wilkie again! If ever there was a troublesome set of men on earth it's country attorneys. Just put these things back into the safe, there's a good fellow, and turn the key on them. The combination's "Lionel." It's all yours, you see, all yours, my boy, so I open and shut the lock with your name for a key, Leo.' And he gave an affectionate glance at the oleaginous young man (who sat tilting his chair) as he retreated hurriedly towards the door and the staircase.

Thus providentially left to himself in full possession, Mr. Lionel Solomons could hardly refrain from bursting out at once into a hearty laugh. It was too funny! Did

there ever live on earth such a precious old fool as his uncle Judah? 'It's all yours, you see!' Ha, ha, the humour of it! He should just think it was, more literally now than Uncle Judah intended. And he opened the safe to the word 'Lionel!' Such innocence deserved to be severely fleeced. It positively deserved. A man who had reached his uncle Judah's years ought surely to know better than leave anybody whatsoever—friend or foe—face to face alone with those convertible securities.

When Mr. Lionel Solomons came down to Hillborough, it had been his intention to spend the whole of that night under the avuncular roof; to possess himself of the avuncular keys and combination; and to rifle that safe in fear and trembling in the small hours of the morning, when he meant to rise on the plea of catching the first train to London. But fate and that old fool had combined to put things far more easily into his power for a moment. All he had to do was to place such bonds and securities as were most easily negotiable in his own pocket-book, to stick the worthless Gascoyne

notes of hand, as too cheap for robbing, in their accustomed pigeon-hole, to lock the safe to a different combination (which would render immediate detection somewhat less probable), and return the keys with the smiling face of innocence to his respected relation. And as Mr. Lionel was not without a touch of grim humour in his composition, he chose for the combination by which alone the safe could next be opened the one significant word, 'Idiot.' 'If he finds that out,' the dutiful nephew chuckled to himself merrily, 'why, all I can say is, he'll be a great deal less of one than ever I take him to be.'

When Mr. Solomons once more reappeared upon the scene, flushed again with contention with his natural enemies, the attorneys, Mr. Lionel handed him back his bunch of keys with perfect sangfroid, and merely observed with a gentle smile of superior compassion, 'I wouldn't get rid of those Central Southern yet awhile if I were you. The tightness won't last. I don't believe in these bearing operations.'

'They're bound to rise later, with the half-yearly dividend.'

And as Mr. Lionel went back to town that same afternoon in high good-humour, cigarette in mouth and flower in buttonhole, he carried with him a considerable sum in stocks and shares of the most marketable character, every one of which could be readily turned into gold or notes before the sailing of the *Dom Pedro* on Tuesday morning.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON THE TRACK OF THE ROBBER.

FIVE days later Paul Gascoyne was sitting at his desk in the lodgings off Gower Street, working away with all his might at a clever middle for an evening newspaper. Paul was distinctly successful in what the trade technically knows as middles; he had conquered the peculiarities of style and matter that go to make up that singular literary product, and he had now invented a *genre* of his own which was greatly appreciated by novelty-loving editors. He had just finished an amusing little diatribe against the ladylike gentlemen who go in for fads in the House of Commons, and was polishing up his manuscript by strengthening his verbs and crisping his adjectives, when a loud knock at the

door disturbed the even flow of his rounded periods ; and before he had even time to say ‘ Come in,’ the door opened of itself, and Mr. Solomons in person stood looming large before him, utterly breathless.

At first sight Paul was fairly taken aback by Mr. Solomons’ deep and peculiar colour. To be sure, the young man was accustomed to seeing his old friend and creditor red enough in the face, or even blue ; but he had never before seen him of such a bright cerulean tint at that moment ; and the blueness and the breathlessness both equally frightened him. ‘ Take a chair, Mr. Solomons,’ he broke out, starting up in surprise, but almost before the words were well out of his mouth Mr. Solomons had sunk exhausted of his own accord on the sofa. He tried to speak, but words clearly failed him. Only an inarticulate gurgle gave vent to his emotion. It was plain some terrible event had disturbed his equanimity. Paul bustled about, hardly knowing what to do, but with a vague idea that brandy-and-water administered cold might, perhaps, best meet the exigencies of the situation.

After a minute or two a very strong dose of brandy seemed to restore Mr. Solomons to comparative tranquillity, though he was still undeniably very much agitated. As soon as he could gasp out a few broken words, however, he seized his young friend's hand in his own, and ejaculated in an almost inaudible voice. 'It's not for myself, Sir Paul, it's not for myself I mind so much—though even that's terrible—but how can I ever have the courage to break it to Leo?'

'To break what, Mr. Solomons?' Paul asked, bewildered. 'What's the matter? What's happened? Sit quiet awhile, and then tell me shortly.'

'I can't sit quiet,' Mr. Solomons answered, rising and pacing the room with a wavering step and panting lungs; 'I can't sit quiet when, perhaps, the thief's this very minute getting rid of my valuable securities. Leo always told me I should be robbed; he always told me so, but I never listened to him. And now, poor boy, he's beggared—beggared!'

'Has something been stolen, then?' Paul ventured to suggest tentatively.

‘Something!’ Mr. Solomons echoed, laying stress with profound emotion on that most inadequate dissyllable, ‘something: everything! Every penny on earth I’ve got to bless myself almost—except what’s out; and Leo, poor Leo, he’s left without anything.’

‘You don’t mean to say so!’ Paul exclaimed, surprised, and not knowing exactly how else to express his sympathy.

‘Yes,’ Mr. Solomons continued, seizing the young man’s hand once more, and wringing it in his despair; ‘Paul, Paul—I beg pardon, Sir Paul, I mean—but this loss has taken me back at once to old times—my poor boy’s ruined, irretrievably ruined. Unless we can catch the thief, that is to say. And I ought to be after him this minute; I ought to be at Scotland Yard, giving notice to the police, and down in Capel Court to warn the brokers. But I couldn’t, I couldn’t. I hadn’t strength or breath left to do it. I had to come here first to tell you the truth, and to get you to go with me to interview these people. If Leo’d been in town I’d have gone straight off, of course, to Leo. But he started for his holiday to Switzerland

on Saturday, and I don't know where to telegraph to him, even, for he hadn't decided what route he would take when I last saw him.'

'How did it happen?' Paul asked, trying to press Mr. Solomons into a chair once more. 'And how much has been stolen?'

'My safe's been rifled,' Mr. Solomons went on with exceeding vehemence, going a livid hue in the face once more. 'It's been gutted down, every bond that was in it—all negotiable—bonds payable to bearer—everything but your own notes of hand, Sir Paul, and those the thief left only because he couldn't easily get rid of them in London.'

'And when did all this happen?' Paul inquired, aghast.

'It couldn't have been earlier than Thursday last,' Mr. Solomons replied, still gasping for breath. 'On Thursday Leo came down to see me and tell me about his plans for his holiday, and I wanted to consult him about the Central Southern Debentures, which they've been trying to "bear" so persistently of late; so I went to my safe—I don't often go to that safe except on special business—

and took out all my bonds and securities, and they were all right then. Leo and I both saw them and went over them; and I said to Leo, 'This is all yours, my boy—all yours in the end, you know, and now he's beggared! Oh, how ever shall I have the face to tell him!'

'But when did you find it out?' Paul asked, still as wholly unsuspecting of the true state of affairs as Mr. Solomons himself, and feeling profoundly for the old man's distress. For it isn't a small matter, whoever you may be, to lose at one blow the whole savings of a lifetime.

'This morning,' Mr. Solomons answered, wiping his beaded brow with his big silk pocket-handkerchief—'this very morning. Do you think I'd have let a night pass, Sir Paul, without getting on his track? When once I'd discovered it, do you think I'd have let him get all that start for nothing? Oh no, the rascal—the mean, thieving villain! If I catch him, he shall have the worst the law can give. He shall have fourteen years—I wish it was life. I wish we had the good old hanging days back again, I do; he

should swing for it then ! I should like to see him swinging ! To think he should try to beggar my poor dear Leo !

And then, by various jerky and inarticulate stages, Mr. Solomons slowly explained to Paul the manner of the discovery : how he had decided after all, in view of suspicious rumours afloat about the safety of a tunnel, to sell the Central Southern Debentures at 87 3-8ths, in spite of Leo ; how he had gone to the safe and tried his familiar combination, ' Lionel ' ; how the key had refused to answer to the word ; how, in his perplexity, he had called in a smith to force the lock open by fire and arms, which, apparently, was Mr. Solomons' own perversion of *vi et armis*, and how, at last, when he succeeded, he found the pigeon-holes bare, and nothing left but Paul's own notes of hand for money lent and interest. ' So, unless I find him, Sir Paul,' the old man cried piteously, wringing his hands in despair and growing bluer and bluer in the face than ever, ' I shall have nothing left but what little's out and what you can pay me off ; and I don't want to be a burden to you—I don't want to be a burden.'

‘We must go down to Scotland Yard at once and hunt up the thief,’ Paul replied resolutely; ‘and we must go and stop the bonds before another hour’s over.’

‘But he may have sold them already,’ Mr. Solomons cried with a despondent face. ‘They were there on Thursday, I know, but how soon after that he carried them off I haven’t the very slightest notion. They were all negotiable—every one negotiable; and he may have cleared off with the money or the bonds by this time to Berlin or Vienna.’

‘You suspect nobody?’ Paul asked, drawing on his boots to go down to Scotland Yard.

‘I’ve nobody to suspect,’ Mr. Solomons answered with a profound sigh. ‘Except Leo and myself, nobody ever had access to or went near that safe. Nobody knew the combination to open it. But whoever did it,’ and here Mr. Solomons’ lips grew positively black and his cheek darkened, ‘he had the impudence to set the combination wrong, and the word he set it to was “Idiot,” if you’ll believe it. He not only robbed me,

but he insulted me as well. He took the trouble to lock the door of the safe to the deliberately insolent word "Idiot."

'That's very curious,' Paul said. 'He must have had time to waste if he could think of doing that. A midnight thief would have snatched the bonds and left the safe open.'

'No,' Mr. Solomons answered with decision and with prompt business insight, 'he wouldn't have done that; for then I'd have known I'd been robbed at once, and I'd have come up to town by the very next train and prevented his negotiating. The man that took them would want to sell them. It all depends upon whether he's had time for managing that. They're securities to bearer that can pass from hand to hand like a fi'pun note. If he took them Friday, he'd Saturday and Monday. If he took them Saturday, he'd Monday and that's all. But, then, we can't tell where he's been likely to sell them. Some of 'em he could sell in Paris or in Liverpool as easy as in London; and from Liverpool he could clear out at once to America.'

They went down the stairs even as he spoke to Mr. Solomons' hansom, which was waiting at the door.

'It's strange you can't think of any likely person to have done it,' Paul said as they got into it.

'Ah, if Leo were in town,' Mr. Solomons exclaimed, with much dejection, 'he'd soon hunt 'em up! Leo's so smart. He'd spot the thief like one o'clock. But he's gone on his holiday, and I can't tell where to find him. Sir Paul, I wouldn't mind so much if it was only for myself, but how can I ever tell Leo? How can I break it to Leo?'

And Paul, reflecting silently to himself, was forced to admit that the revelation would doubtless put a severe strain upon Mr. Lionel Solomons' family affection.

At Scotland Yard they met with immediate and respectful attention—an attention due in part, perhaps, to the magnitude of the loss, for bonds to a very considerable amount were in question, but largely also, no doubt, to that unobtrusive visiting-card, which announced the younger and more retiring of the two complainants as 'Sir Paul Gascoyne,

Bart.' The law, to be sure, as we all know, is no respecter of persons ; but hardly anyone would ever find that out in modern England from the way it is administered.

Before the end of the afternoon they had gone with a detective round Capel Court and the stockbroking quarter generally, and had succeeded in discovering in a single unimportant case what disposition had been made of one of the missing securities. By a miracle of skill, the detective had slowly tracked down a small bond for £200 to a dark young man, close-shaven and muffled, with long lank hair too light for his complexion, who seemed thoroughly well up in the ways of the City, and who gave his name as John Howard Lewis. Mr. Lewis had so evidently understood his business, and had offered his bond for sale with such thorough frankness and openness, that nobody at the broker's had for a moment dreamt of suspecting or questioning him. He had preferred to be paid by cheque to bearer—wanting, as he said, the money for an immediate purpose ; and this cheque was duly returned as cashed the same day at the London Joint

Stock Bank in Prince's Street by Mr. Lewis in person. It hadn't passed through anybody's account, and payment had been taken in Bank of England tens and twenties, the numbers of which were of course duly noted. As a matter of fact, however, this latter precaution was of very little use, for every one of the notes had been changed later in the day (though Mr. Solomons didn't find that fact out till somewhat after) into Bank of France notes and American greenbacks, which were converted back still more recently into English currency, so that almost all trace of the thief in this way was lost. Mr. Solomons had no clue by which he could find him.

'The oddest part of it all,' Mr. Solomons remarked to the detective as they travelled back by Metropolitan together to Scotland Yard, 'is that this bond was offered for sale on Friday morning.'

'It was,' the detective answered with cautious reserve. 'Well, then, what of that, sir?'

'Why, then,' Mr. Solomons went on, profoundly puzzled, 'the lot must have been

stolen on Thursday night, for my nephew and I saw them all quite safe in their place on Thursday.'

'They must,' the detective answered with dry acquiescence. He was forming his conclusions.

Mr. Solomons moaned and clasped his hands hard between his knees.

'If we catch the rogue,' he murmured, 'he'll have fourteen years for it.'

'Undoubtedly,' the detective answered, and ruminated to himself; a clue was working in his professional brain. The bonds had been abstracted between Mr. Lionel's visit on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning. That narrowed the inquiry to very restricted limits indeed: so Sherrard, the detective, observed to himself inwardly.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HUNTED DOWN.

THAT night Mr. Solomons slept at Paul's lodgings.

About seven in the morning, before either of them was up, the detective came once more, all radiant in the face, with important tidings. He asked to see Sir Paul Gascoyne. As soon as Sir Paul came out into the little study and sitting-room to meet him, Mr. Sherrard jerked his head mysteriously towards the door of Mr. Solomons' bedroom, and observed in a voice full of confidential reserve :

‘I didn't want too much to upset the old gentleman.’

‘Have you got a clue?’ Paul asked, with profound interest.

And the detective answered with the same mysterious air :

‘Yes, we’ve got a clue—a clue that I think will surprise him a little. But we’ll have to travel down to Cornwall, him and me, as quick as we can travel, before we can be sure of it.’

‘To Cornwall!’ Paul repeated, astonished. ‘You don’t mean to say the thief’s gone down to Cornwall, of all places in England?’

For Nea lived in Cornwall, and hallowed it by her presence. To think that a man who stole bonds and scrip should have the face to take them to the county thus sanctified by Nea !

‘Well, no,’ the detective answered, pointing with his thumb, and his head once more in a most significant fashion towards the room where Mr. Solomons was still in unconscious enjoyment of his first slumber for the night ; for he had lain awake, tossing and turning, full of his loss, till five in the morning. ‘He ain’t exactly *gone* there ; but we’ve got to go there ourselves to follow him. The fact of it is, I’ve come upon a trace. We were working all evening at it—our men from the Yard, for we

thought, from his taking it all in a cheque to bearer, he was likely to clear out as fast as he could clear ; and we've tried to find where he was likely to clear out for.'

'And what have you discovered ?' Paul asked breathless.

'Well, we tracked our man from the brokers', you see, to a money-changer's in the Strand,' the detective responded, still very confidentially. 'It was lucky the old gentleman got wind of it all so soon, or we mightn't have been able to track him so easily. After a month or two, of course, the scent mightn't lie. But being as it was only last Friday it happened, the track was pretty fresh. And we found out, at the changer's, he'd offered two hundred pounds in Bank of England twenties for French notes of a thousand francs. That was all right and straightforward, to be sure. But here's where the funny part of the thing comes in. From the changer's in the Strand, he went straight down to Charing Cross Station, and at the little office thereby, where the cabs drive out, he changed back the French thousands, d'ye see, for Bank of England tens again.'

And the detective closed his left eye slowly and reflectively.

‘Just to confuse the track, I suppose,’ Paul put in, by way of eliciting further communication.

‘That’s it, sir,’ the detective went on. ‘You’re on it like a bird. He wanted to get a hold of notes that couldn’t be tracked. But all the same, we’ve tracked ’em. It was sharp work to do it, all in one night, but still we tracked ’em. We’d got to do it at once, for fear the fellow should get clean away; so it put us on our mettle. Well, we’ve tracked ’em at last. We find eight of them notes, balance of passage-money, was paid in on Monday at the Royal Steam Company’s offices in the City.’

‘You don’t mean to say so!’ Paul exclaimed, much interested. ‘By whom, and to where, then?’

‘By a dark young gentleman, same height and build as Mr. John Howard Lewis, and about the same description as to face and features, but blacker in the hair, and curlier, by what they tell us. And this gentleman had a moustache when he took the tickets

first on Tuesday week ; but the moustache was shaved off when he paid the balance of the passage - money on Monday. It was twelve at night when we hunted up the clerk who arranged the passage, at his lodgings at Clapham ; but he remembered it distinctly, because at first he didn't recognise the gentleman owing to the change in his personal appearance ; and then, later, he recollected it was the same face, but close-shaven since he called first time about the berth ; so that pretty well fixes it.'

'But he paid eighty pounds,' Paul said, unsuspecting even so, 'if he got rid of eight of them. Where on earth was he going to with a passage-money like that, then ?'

'Well, it wasn't all for himself,' the detective answered dryly, still eyeing him closely. 'It generally ain't. We count upon that, almost. There's mostly a woman at the bottom of all these 'ere embezzlement or robbery cases. The gentleman gave the name of Burton, instead of Lewis, at the Royal Mail Company's offices, and he took two berths for himself and Mrs. Percy Maybank Burton. When a gentleman's got two names at once

there's usually something or other to inquire into about him. Often enough he's got a third, too. Anyhow, the eighty pounds he paid was for balance of passage-money for himself and lady.'

'Where to?' Paul asked once more.

'To Buenos Ayres,' the detective answered with pardonable pride. 'And I thought I'd better tell *you* first, so as not to make it too great a shock, don't you see, for the poor old gentleman.'

'Too great a shock!' Paul repeated, bewildered.

'Well, yes. He mightn't like it, you know. It might sort of upset him.'

'To know you've got a clue!' Paul exclaimed, much puzzled.

'Well, not exactly that,' the detective answered, gazing at him with a sort of gentle and pitying wonder. 'But to hear—that the person has gone off with a lady.'

'I don't quite see why,' Paul replied vaguely.

The detective seemed amused.

'Oh, well, if *you* don't see it, perhaps *he* won't see it either,' he went on, smiling. 'Of

course, it ain't no business of mine to object. I'm a public officer, and I've only got to do my duty. I'm going down to Cornwall to try and arrest my man, but I thought, perhaps, you or the old gentleman might like to come down and help me to identify him.'

'To identify him!' Paul echoed.

'Well, to secure him, anyhow,' the detective answered cautiously. 'You see, I've got out a warrant for his apprehension, of course—in different aliases; and we may as well have all the information we can, so as to make quite sure beforehand of our capture. But we must go by the 9.40 from Paddington, anyhow.'

'Where to?' Paul inquired, more mystified than ever.

'To Redruth and Helston,' the detective replied, coming down to business. 'From there we'll have to post to the Lizard, and try to intercept him.'

'Oh, I see,' Paul said, 'you want to stop the steamer?'

The detective nodded.

'That's it,' he assented. 'He's aboard the

Dom Pedro, from Southampton for Brazil and Argentine ports. She don't call for mails, unfortunately, at Falmouth; but she may be caught off the Lizard still, if we make haste to stop her. If not, we shall telegraph on to Rio and Buenos Ayres, and an officer 'll go out by Lisbon, on the offchance to catch him under Extradition Treaty.'

'You settled all that to-night?' Paul asked, amazed at this promptitude.

'Yes; we settled all that in the small hours of the morning. It's a big affair, you see, and that put us on our mettle, and I've come to know if either of you want to go down to the Lizard along of me.'

'For whom is the warrant?'

The detective looked hard at him.

'For Percy Maybank Burton,' he answered with one eye closed. 'You see, that's the only certain name we've got to go upon, though there's an alias to the warrant—alias John Howard Lewis and others. He gave his name as Burton to the company, of course, and he's Burton aboard. We didn't get none for the apprehension of the

woman. She ain't identified yet; but if the young chap comes off, of course she'll follow him.'

'Of course,' Paul answered, without much knowing why. For he had no reason on earth for connecting Madame Ceriolo directly or indirectly with the unknown criminal. If he had, perhaps he might have spoken with less of certainty.

'What's up?' Mr. Solomons called out from the passage, putting his head out of the door at sound of the detective's voice.

The officer, in carefully guarded terms, explained to him in full the existing state of affairs.

Mr. Solomons didn't take long in making up his mind.

'I'll go!' he said briefly. 'I'll catch the scoundrel if it's the last thing in this world I ever do. The rascal, to try to rob Leo and me like that! He shall have fourteen years for it, if there's law in England. Hard labour, penal servitude. Only I ain't fit to go down there alone. If I catch him it'll make me so angry to see him, I shall have a bad turn with my heart; I know I shall,

to a certainty. But no matter, I'll go. I only wish Leo was in England to go with me.'

'Well, he ain't,' Mr. Sherrard answered in the same short sharp tone in which he had spoken before; 'so, if you mean to come, you must make up your mind to come as you are and get ready instanter.'

But if Mr. Solomons had 'come as he was' the authorities of the Great Western Railway would have been somewhat surprised at the apparition of a gentleman at Paddington Station in slippers and nightshirt.

Paul considered a moment and looked at the old man. Mr. Solomons was undoubtedly a hale and hearty person in most respects; but his heart was distinctly unfit for the sort of strain that was now being put upon it. Paul had noticed the day before how the arteries in his forehead had bounded with excitement, and then how the veins had swelled with congested blood, as the fit passed over. If he went down to the Lizard alone with the detective and put himself into a fume trying to catch the robber of his bonds, Paul hardly liked to answer for the possible

consequences. And strange as it may sound to say so, the young man had a curious half-filial sentiment lurking somewhere in his heart towards the old Hillborough money-lender. He had never ceased to feel that it was Mr. Solomons who had made him what he was. If it hadn't been for Mr. Solomons, he might still have been lounging about a stable in Hillborough, instead of writing racy and allusive middles for the *Monday Remembrancer*. He hesitated for an instant to press himself upon his old friend—the third-class fare to Cornwall and back mounts up, I can tell you—but in the end his good-nature and gratitude conquered. 'If you care for my company, I'll gladly go with you, Mr. Solomons,' he suggested timidly.

Mr. Solomons wrung his young friend's hand with affectionate regard.

'That's very kind of you, Sir Paul,' he said; 'that's very, very kind of you. I appreciate it, that a gentleman in your position—yes, yes, I know my place,' for Paul had made a little deprecatory gesture—'should be so good as to desert his own work and go with me. But if you go, you must let me

pay all expenses, for this is my business ; and if Leo had been in England, Leo 'd have run down with me.'

'Well, make haste,' the detective said dryly. He had a singularly reticent manner, that detective. 'You've no time to lose, gentlemen. Get your things together, and put 'em into a hansom, and we'll drive off at once to Paddington together.'

CHAPTER XL.

‘CORNWALL TO WIT.’

ALL the way down to Redruth and Helston, Paul noticed vaguely that both his fellow-travellers were silent and preoccupied. Mr. Solomons, when he spoke at all, spoke for the most part of Lionel, and of this wicked attempt to deprive him of his patrimony. More than once he took a large folded paper out of his pocket, of very legal aspect, bearing on its face, in most lawyer-like writing, the engrossed legend—‘Will of Judah P. Solomons, Gentleman.’ This interesting document he opened and showed in part to Paul. It was a cheerful and rather lengthy performance of its own kind, marked by the usual legal contempt for literary style, and the common legal love for most pleonastic redun-

dancy ; everything was described in it under at least three alternative nouns, as 'all that house, messuage, or tenement'; and everybody was mentioned by every one of his names, titles, and places of residence, whenever he was referred to, with no stops to speak of, but with a graceful sprinkling of that precious word 'aforesaid' as a substitute in full for all punctuation. Nevertheless, it set forth in sufficiently succinct terms that the testator, being then of sound state of mind and in possession of all his intellectual faculties as fully as at any period of life, did give and devise to his nephew, Lionel Solomons, gentleman, the whole of his estate, real or personal, in certain specified ways and manners and for his own sole use and benefit. The will further provided that, in case the said Lionel Solomons, gentleman, should predecease the testator, then and in that case testator gave and devised all his estate aforesaid, real or personal, in trust to the Jewish Board of Guardians of London, to be by them applied to such ends and purposes, in connection with the welfare of the Hebrew population of the Metropolitan Postal District,

as might to them seem good in the exercise of their wise and sole discretion.

'It was every penny Leo's, you see,' Mr. Solomons repeated many times over with profound emotion—'every penny Leo's. All my life's savings were made for Leo. And to think that rascal should have tried to deprive him of it! Fourteen years he shall have, if there's law in England, Sir Paul. Fourteen years, with hard labour too, if there's law in England.'

As for Sherrard the detective—that moody man—he smiled grimly to himself every time Mr. Solomons made these testamentary confidences to his young friend; and once he ventured to remark, with a faintly significant air, that that would be a confounded fine haul of its sort for the Jewish Board of Guardians, if ever they came in for it.

'But they won't,' Mr. Solomons answered warmly. 'They'll never come in for it. I've only put it there out of a constitutional habit of providing beforehand for any contingency. My heart ain't what it used to be. Any sudden shock now 'd bring it up short, like a horse against a hedge he can't take. I

just added that reminder to the Board of Guardians to show I never turned my back upon my own people. I'm not one of those Jews afraid and ashamed to be known for Jews. A Christian I may be; a man can't be blamed for changing his religious convictions—on sufficient grounds—but a Hebrew I was born and a Hebrew I'll remain to the end of the chapter. I won't ever turn my back upon my own kith and kindred.'

'There's some as does,' the detective remarked enigmatically, and relapsed once more into the corner cushion.

It's a long way from Paddington to Helston; but the weariest day comes to an end at last; and in time they reached the distant Cornish borough. It was late at night when they disembarked on the platform, but no time was to be lost; if they wanted to stop the *Dom Pedro* as she passed the Lizard Light, they must drive across at once to the end of the promontory, to arrange signals. So they chartered a carriage without delay at Helston Station, and set out forthwith on their journey across the long, dark moor in solemn silence. They were in no mood for talking, indeed.

The day in the train had tired them all, and now they must snatch what sleep they might, against to-morrow's work, in the jolting carriage.

The drive across the tableland of the Lizard is always, even by day, a wild and lonely one; but on this particular night it was wilder, lonelier and darker than ever. More than once the driver pulled up his horses in the middle of the road, to consider his way, and more than once he got down and walked some yards ahead to see whether by any chance he had missed some familiar landmark. On each such occasion Mr. Solomons' fretfulness and anxiety visibly increased. At last he could stand these frequent interruptions to the continuity of the journey no longer. He put his head out of the window and expostulated warmly.

'What are you waiting like this for, man?' he cried in an angry tone. 'Don't you know your way? I declare it's too bad. If you couldn't find the road from Helston to the Lizard you oughtn't to have taken us. There's thousands at stake—thousands of pounds' worth of bonds that rogue has stolen;

and if we're not at the Lizard in time to catch him, he may get clean off with them to South America.'

The man looked back at his fare with a half-contemptuous glance.

'That's the way of all you London people,' he answered gruffly with the stolid Cornish moroseness. 'Always a-fault-finding. And yet there's fog enough, they tells me, too, in London!'

'Fog!' Mr. Solomons ejaculated, catching hastily at his meaning with the quickened perception that comes at any great critical moment of life.

'Ay, fog,' the man answered. 'Lizard fog, they calls it. Fog that thick you can't hardly see your hand before you. It's bad enough driving over Helston Moor dark nights any time; but with a fog like this it's a toss-up if ever we get at all to Lizard Town.'

Mr. Solomons gazed out blankly into the black night. He saw it at a glance. It was all too true. A finger-post stood by the roadside opposite, but even with the light from the carriage-lamp falling full upon it, he could hardly make out its shape, far less its lettering,

through the dim, misty shroud that intervened between him and the roadside. He flung himself back on the cushions with a groan of despair.

'If we go on at this snail's pace,' he cried in the bitterness of his heart, 'we shall never reach there in time to stop her. That thief 'll get off clear with the bonds to South America, and Leo 'll be ruined!'

The driver laughed again in the old man's face—the hard, dry, sardonic Cornish laugh.

'That's the way of you London people,' he repeated once more, with the critical frankness and openness of his race. 'Thinks you knows everything, and ain't got no common gumption about anything anyhow! Why, who supposes the steamer can get past the Lizard in a fog like this, when we can't so much as find our way on the open road across the moor by dry land from Helston. What delays *us* 'll delay *her*. She'll anchor till morning, and wait for it to clear, that's what she'll do, unless she bears away out to sea southward. She couldn't get past the lighthouse in this sort of weather, could she?'

'No—couldn't she, though?' Mr. Solo-

mons cried, appeased and relieved. 'You think she'll wait till the fog lifts in the morning?'

'She's bound to,' the driver answered confidently, 'if she don't want to go to pieces on Cadgwith Cliffs, or on the rocks over yonder by the church at St. Ruan's. There's many of 'em as has gone to pieces in a fog nigh Cadgwith, I tell you. Ay, and many a ship as has drowneded them by the dozen, so as the Cadgwith men has made fortunes time and again out of the salvage. "God's providence is my inheritance"—that's the motto of the Cadgwith men ever since the days when their fathers was wreckers.' And the driver laughed to himself a sullen, hard laugh, indicative of thorough appreciation of the grimly humorous view of Providence embodied in the local coastwise proverb.

A strange shudder passed through Mr. Solomons' massive frame.

'Gone to pieces in a fog!' he repeated. 'You don't mean that! And drowned there, too! That'd be worse than all. He might go down with the bonds in his case! And, anyhow, he'd do us out of the fourteen years' imprisonment.'

The detective glanced over at Paul with a curious look, whose exact meaning Paul was at a loss to determine.

'If he drowns!'

'If he drowns,' the officer said, in that restrained tone he had so often adopted, 'that's the hand of God. The hand of God, you see, cancels and overrides any magistrate's warrant.'

Mr. Solomons clenched his fist hard, and looked blankly in front of him.

'All the same,' he said fiercely, with long-smouldering indignation, 'I don't want to lose all my precious bonds, and I don't want the fellow to get off his fourteen years' imprisonment.'

'Whoever he may be?' the detective murmured tentatively.

'Whoever he may be,' Mr. Solomons assented, with angry vehemence. 'I'm an honest man. I've worked hard for my money. Why should I and my nephew be beggared by anyone?'

They drove on still through the gloom and mist, and gradually felt their way by stumbling steps across the great open moor

towards the point of the Lizard. As they drew nearer and nearer they could hear the fog-horn at the lighthouse blowing loudly now and at frequent intervals, and bells were ringing, and strange noises along the coast resounded hoarsely. But all around was black as midnight; and when at last they reached the Lizard Lighthouse, even the great electric light itself hardly traversed the gloom or shed a faint ray at the base of its own tall and dripping pedestal.

Mr. Solomons bustled out, and hurriedly informed the coastguardsman at the preventive station of the nature of their errand. The coastguardsman shook his head gravely.

‘Not to-night,’ he said. ‘This ain’t no time for going to signal a ship to stop, no matter for what. You can put out a boat and try to meet her if you like; but it ain’t likely in such weather you’d find her. More chance to be run down yourself unbeknown by her and drowned without her even so much as sighting you.’

‘She hasn’t gone by yet?’ Mr. Solomons asked eagerly.

‘No, she ain’t gone by yet,’ the coastguards-

man replied. 'But she's expected every minute. She'd signal by gun or fog-horn, I take it. Though we ain't heard nothing of her so far, to be sure. Most likely she's sounded and found herself in shoal water, and so she's dropped anchor and laid by till morning.'

'Then the best thing for us to do,' Paul suggested, 'is to turn in quietly at the hotel for the night, and see whether we can find her early to-morrow.'

To this plan of action, however, neither Mr. Solomons nor the detective would at all consent. They insisted upon remaining about within call of the lighthouse, on the off-chance of the *Dom Pedro* appearing from minute to minute. One of them felt constrained by duty, the other by animosity and love of money, and neither would yield one jot or tittle of his just pretensions. So Paul was fain to give way to their combined authority at last, and walk up and down in that damp night-fog by the edge of the cliffs that line round the great promontory.

So weird or impressive a sheet of fog Paul had never before in his life seen. It was

partly the place, partly the time, but partly, also, the intense thickness of that dense Channel sea-mist that enthralled his fancy, He descended by himself slowly, with shambling steps, along the steep path that leads down to the water's edge at the very point of the Lizard. To render it more visible on dark nights, the coastguardsmen have white-washed the dark patches of rock by the side, and piled up along the jagged pinnacles little heaps, or cairns, of white pebbles. But even so aided, it was with difficulty that Paul could pick his way along the uncertain path, especially as in parts it was wet with spray and slimy with the evaporations of salt sea-water. There was little wind, as is usually the case in foggy weather, but the long Atlantic groundswell nevertheless made big breakers on the abrupt rocks; and the thunder of the waves, as they surged and burst below among the unseen caves and dark cliffs of the promontory, had a peculiarly wild and solemn sound on that black night, now just merging towards the first cold gray of morning. Paul was afraid to trust himself within sight of the waves, not knowing how near it might be

safe to approach ; but he sat for awhile, alone in the damp darkness, on the narrow ledge that seemed to overhang the hoarse chorus of breakers beneath, and listened with a certain strange poetic thrill to the thunderous music of the Atlantic below him.

And ever and anon, above the noise of the waves, the dull, droning voice of the gigantic fog-horn broke in upon the current of his solemn reverie.

It was a night to pity men at sea in.

All at once, a sudden flash to eastward, hardly descried through the fog, seemed to illumine for a second, in a haze of light, the mist around him. Next instant a boom sounded loud in his ears—the boom of a great gun, as if fired point-blank towards him.

How near it might be, Paul could hardly guess ; but he was conscious at the same time of the odour of gunpowder strong in his nostrils, while the choking sensation that accompanies great closeness to a big explosion almost unnerved him, and rendered him giddy for a moment. He rose in alarm at the shock, but his feet failed him. He had hardly the power left to scale the rocks once more by

the whitewashed path. The concussion and the foul air had well-nigh stupefied him.

Nevertheless, as he mounted to the lighthouse again he was intuitively aware of what was happening close by. Vague noises and feelings seemed to press the truth on him as if by instinct. A great ship was in danger—in pressing danger—on the rocks of the Lizard.

She had come across the breakers unawares in a dense fog, and had fired her gun for a signal almost point-blank in Paul's very face. Had he not by good-luck been turned the other way, and with his eyes half shut dreamily, as he listened to the thunder of those long Atlantic waves and the moaning of the fog-horn, it would certainly have blinded him.

And now, for all Paul knew to the contrary, the big ship was going to pieces on the jagged rocks beneath him there.

Then, with a second flash of intuition, it came home to him more fully, as he recovered his senses from the sudden shock, that this was in all probability the watched-for *Dom Pedro*—with the thief on board her.

CHAPTER XLI.

A RESCUE.

CLIMBING back hurriedly, but cautiously, to the top, Paul groped his way through the thick mist to the lighthouse, where all was already bustle and confusion. The first gray light of dawn was beginning to struggle faintly through the dense fog, and swirling wreaths of vapour grew vaguely visible in the direction of the cliff, whither people were feeling their way with outstretched arms, and much noise of preparation, towards the cove and the lifeboat.

‘What’s the matter?’ Paul asked one rough sailor-looking man, whom he followed towards the house where the lifeboat was harboured.

‘Matter?’ the man answered. ‘Why,

salvage, that's what it is. Vessel gone ashore on Long Men Rocks. Steamer, most likely. Brazil packet from Southampton, I take it. Very good salvage.'

It's an ill wind that blows nobody good. The descendant of the wreckers was thinking only of his own inheritance.

Paul hurried on in the man's footsteps till he reached the shore. There, through the vague gloom, he saw Mr. Solomons and the detective already before him. The sailors were pushing out the lifeboat over the short shingle beach, and fishermen about were putting off small rowing-craft to take their share in the expected harvest of salvage.

Before he knew exactly how it was all happening, he found himself seated in one of the small boats, with Mr. Solomons and the detective, while two sturdy fishermen were pushing them seaward, through that tremendous surf that seemed certain to swamp them with its huge curling breakers.

For a minute or two the waves broke in upon them, drenching them through and through with showers of spray, and half filling the boat. Then the fishermen, finding

at last the long-looked-for opportunity, pushed her successfully off on a retiring wave, and got her safe out to sea beyond the reach of the great curving billows. Once well afloat they found the sea itself comparatively smooth, though heaving and tossing with a long glassy swell, whose ups and downs were far deeper in their way than anything that Paul had ever before experienced. The boatmen rowed on in the wake of the lifeboat, through the fog and darkness, towards the sound of a bell that rang with a long, irregular, rocking movement some hundred yards or so southward of them. Paul knew instinctively, somehow, that no one was ringing the bell. It was the rise and fall of the vessel as she dashed helplessly upon the rocks that made that unearthly rhythm; she was tolling her own knell as the breakers broke her upon the jagged and water-worn pinnacles of the Lizard.

As they approached nearer, little more was visible. It added to the weird horror and awe of the tragedy, indeed, that nothing could be seen of it. They only knew by

inference that a great ship was being foundered and ground to pieces by some invisible force within a few yards of them.

But the breakers themselves and the rocks were faintly in evidence. Paul could make out through the gloom some sunken stacks of serpentine, round whose crest the big waves made vast curling swoops, and boiled and roared in hideous whirling eddies. The ship had struck from the opposite side, and the boatmen refused to row any nearer; indeed, even where they now held her off, pressing with all their might on the bending oars, the danger of grounding was very considerable. No boat could possibly live in that wild surf upon those broken granite points. If once a wave should catch them on its summit and carry them on to the rocks, all would be up; no human aid could ever avail to save them.

And then, as they held off there, keeping carefully to the trough of the waves, and listening to the cries and shouts that came over to them through the fog, and hearing the dull grating of the hull as it scraped along

the rock with each lifting billow, a louder voice than any rose distinct across the waves—the voice of a ship's officer calling out in wild tones of horror, 'She's parting amidships.'

And so she was ! Next moment they saw upon the breakers close by great fragments of wreck and bits of floating board. There could be no doubt the voice had cried out what was true. A loud snap rent the air ; a crash of breaking, the shrieks and screams redoubled in intensity, and the boatmen holding the boat away, out of reach of the wash, called out aloud, 'She's gone to pieces that time. I heard her crack. Row round the other way, Jim, and help pick up the passengers.'

'Are they drowning ?' Mr. Solomons cried, with a face of terrible relentlessness.

'They're drowning, no doubt,' the man answered, with the stolid matter-of-fact air of the hardened seaman. 'They can't many of 'em live in such a sea as that is. Anywhere else they wouldn't come to much hurt this calm weather—leastways, if they could swim ; but the breakers on the Long Men

Rocks is always terrible. Why, that's where the East Indiaman went to pieces twelve years ago come Christmas, don't you mind, Jimmy ?

'I hope he won't drown,' Mr. Solomons cried savagely, 'and balk me of justice ! I hope he won't die till I've had my fourteen years out of him !'

The men were rowing their hardest now, and, as Paul could judge by the sounds growing gradually fainter, away from the wreck and the reef of rocks, so as to turn their flank sideways and come in upon them from the open. For nearly ten minutes they rowed on in silence as hard as arms and legs could row, Mr. Solomons sitting grim and unmoved in the stern, while the detective eyed him ever with a strange suspicious side-glance. At the end of that time, the fog lifted a little, a very little, and Paul saw they were skirting the long ridge of rocks, marked some twenty yards off by their white line of breakers.

Presently they saw other boats about —boats whose occupants were engaged in peering into the water in search of black

objects bobbing up and down in it, which they lunged at with boat-hooks. And then, with sudden realization of the whole horror of the thing, Paul recognised with a start that these were human bodies.

In another minute there loomed dimly ahead some dozen yards or so off a great dark mass, moving wildly about among the white sheets of foam; and Paul saw with another terrible shock of awe that it was half the broken hull of a huge ocean-going steamer. She had parted amidships, and one half had sunk already in the deeper water. The other half, yet dashing wildly on the rocks, hung together still upon the reef in front of them.

At the same moment a small black body went floating past, like the others they had seen the neighbouring boatmen lunge at. As it passed them it rose spasmodically to the surface, and two arms were flung up wildly into the air. Through the gray haze of morning Paul could recognise them at once as a woman's arms—a woman's arms plump and smooth and white-skinned.

He jumped up, and, seizing a loose oar in

his hands, held it hastily out towards the despairing creature. But even as he did so, the long swell carried her away from his sight into the deep mist beyond, where she disappeared, shrieking. They rowed with all speed towards the spot where she had disappeared, and there once more came in sight of the woman. By this time another boat had found her, and was pulling her in. With frantic struggles for life she clutched the gunwale, and climbed over, with the aid of the men's arms, on to the boat's seat. Then she turned round, with her wet dressing-gown dripping around her, and in a shrill voice of horror she cried out to the sailor, 'Go ashore, go ashore! I shall perish of cold here!'

For a second the voice rang with curious familiarity in Paul's ear, but he failed at first to recognise the pale and draggled creature round whose shoulders one of the fishermen was wrapping, with much care, his own rough pilot-coat. Next instant, with a sudden burst of recollection, the voice came back to him in all its well-known sharpness.

'Why, it's Madame Ceriolo!' he cried, unable to restrain his surprise and wonder.

Madame turned round quick as lightning at the sound of her own name and the unexpected recognition. She remembered at once both voice and face. She gave a little start.

‘What ! Mr. Gascoyne !’ she cried, forgetting for the moment Paul’s new-made dignity. Then suddenly her eyes fell on Mr. Solomons’ stern and inflexible figure sitting bolt upright on the seat behind. She knew that face at once, though she had never seen it before. It answered exactly to the photograph Mr. Lionel had shown her of his unconscionable uncle. She read the whole history of the pursuit at a glance. It was old Cento-Cento, come after his dollars.

In the twinkling of an eye she had made up her mind how to behave under the circumstances. Dupe, not accomplice, was now her winning card. Still shivering with cold and half dead with terror, she yet stretched out her arms towards the grim old man, who sat there immovable, taking hardly any notice of the drowning people, and called out in a voice full of earnest gratitude :

‘Why, it’s him, to be sure ! It’s Leo’s

uncle! He's come out with a boat to save me and Leo.'

Like a flash of lightning Paul read the whole truth. It was Lionel, then, who had stolen the bonds from the safe! It was Lionel who was running away on board the *Dom Pedro*! He glanced at the detective, and caught his eye inquiringly. The detective nodded, with that strange smile once more. Instinctively the full horror of the situation dawned at once upon his mind. Mr. Solomons was hunting down to the very death his own cherished nephew. And the detective was there to arrest Mr. Lionel.

He looked at the old usurer in a perfect paroxysm of pity. How on earth would he bear up against this blinding and staggering disillusionment? But a moment's glance showed him that Mr. Solomons hadn't even yet grasped the real situation. He had merely leaned forward eagerly at the sound of his nephew's name, and repeated in a startled and puzzled, but by no means horrified tone:

'Yes, I'm Leo's uncle. Tell me, what do you know or mean about Leo?'

Madame Ceriolo hardly felt sure on the spur of the moment what to answer. It would suit her book better now, all things considered, that Mr. Lionel should go down, with his possibly incriminating evidence on his soul, and that she should be able to pose as one more victim of his selfish criminality. But the position was too strong for her. She felt she must at all risks keep up appearances. So she wrapped the pilot-coat around her tightly with a shudder of alarm (it was immensely easy to get up a shudder in that cold morning air, and with her thin clothes dripping), and cried out in wild tones of impassioned agony :

‘Yes, Leo’s on board. Leo, my Leo! On the rocks there ahead. Oh, save him, save him!’

‘Leo on board!’ Mr. Solomons answered, clapping his hand to his forehead and letting his jaw drop slowly with a stare of astonishment. His look was dazed and bewildered now. ‘Leo on board!’ he repeated, with a terrible wave of doubt passing over his face. Then his mouth closed up again. ‘No, no!’ he went on fixedly. ‘Leo couldn’t be on

board. It's a lie ! It's a lie ! He's gone to Switzerland.'

Madame Ceriolo gazed at him—a childlike and trustful woman.

'Not to Switzerland,' she said, for she felt certain now that all must come out ; 'he'd taken his ticket at the last moment for Buenos Ayres.'

At the word, Mr. Solomons jumped up in the boat with such energy that he almost sent it off its balance.

'For Buenos Ayres !' he cried. 'You don't say that ! Well done, well done—well done indeed, Leo ! He's the very smartest chap in all London, that boy ! Don't you see it, Sir Paul ? Don't you see his game ? He'd tracked the bonds before us, and was on the trail of the robber !'

'At any rate,' Paul cried, looking towards the detective for support, 'our first business now must be to go out and save him.'

Mr. Solomons stood still in the boat and waved wildly forward with his outstretched hand.

'To the wreck ! To the wreck !' he

shouted aloud, above the noise of the breakers. 'I see him ! I see him !'

And, in truth, Paul, turning round towards the hull that still crashed and ground upon the great granite millstones, saw a frantic figure, clasping the shattered taffrail with one clenched hand, and waving wildly toward the boats for assistance with the other. The white swirls of fog were growing thinner now, and through the gap they made he could plainly perceive that the figure was beckoning them with a japanned tin despatch-box of the sort in which bankers keep their clients' documents.

'He *would* go down to fetch them !' Madame Ceriolo cried apologetically from the neighbouring boat. 'We were all on deck and might have been saved together, but he *would* go down to his cabin to fetch them.'

Mr. Solomons gazed back at her with contemptuous pity.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE THIEF IS ARRESTED.

THEY were rowing ahead now with all their thews and muscles, and the breakers, those treacherous, terrible, faithless breakers, were carrying them forward with huge lunges towards the broken hull as fast as they could carry them. The great danger lay in the chance of being dashed against the broadside, and crushed to pieces between the waves and the wreck. The one hope of safety lay in being able to bring the boat within leaping distance or rope-catch for the man on the hull, without going quite so near as to be actually hurled against her side in the effort.

Lionel Solomons stood on the broken deck, frantic with fear, but still clutching the taff-rail. A craven terror had whitened his

pasty face to deadly whiteness. He clung with one hand to his doubtful support, as the waves washed over and over the shattered hull, and ground its spars to pieces on the stacks of rock behind him. Each moment he disappeared from sight beneath a cataract of spray, then reappeared once more as the wave sank back ineffectual. The whole hull swayed and pounded upon the clattering rocks. But Lionel Solomons still clung on, with the wild tenacious grip of his race, to that last chance of safety. He held the despatch-box as firmly in one hand as he held the taffrail with the other. He was clutching to the last at his life and his money.

Mr. Solomons, who had been the first to see him, was also the one to keep him clearest in view, and he urged the fishermen forward through those boisterous waves with his outstretched forefinger turned ever towards the wretched fugitive.

‘My nephew!’ he cried out to them. ‘There he is! That’s he! My nephew! My nephew! A hundred pounds apiece to you, men, if you save my nephew!’

Paul could make him out through the mist quite distinctly now, and he half unconsciously observed, even in that moment of peril and intense excitement, that the reason why he had failed to recognise Lionel earlier was because the miserable man had shaved his upper lip, and otherwise superficially disguised his hair and features.

‘Yes, it’s Leo, it’s Leo!’ Mr. Solomons cried, convulsively clasping his hands. ‘He tracked the fellow down, and followed him out to sea—at his own peril! Fourteen years! Why, the man ought to be hanged, drawn, and quartered!’

‘We’ll never make this arrest,’ the detective murmured, half aside to Paul. ‘Hold her off there, you fishermen; we shall all be dashed to pieces. We shall drown ourselves if we go near enough to save him.’

‘Now then, nearer, nearer!’ Mr. Solomons cried, mad with suspense and agony, and blue in the face with the horror of the crisis. ‘Let her go with the wave! Let him jump, let him jump there! Hold her off with your oars, men; don’t be afraid! A hundred

pounds apiece, I tell you, if you save my nephew !'

As he spoke, the boatmen, taking advantage of the undertow as it rolled off the hull and the reef, put the boat as close in as safety would permit to the riddled broadside, and held up a coil of rope in act to fling it to the terrified fugitive. Lionel still gripped the ill-omened despatch-box. 'Fling it away, man ; fling it away !' the sailor called out impatiently. 'Catch at the rope for dear life as I throw the coil at 'ee !'

Lionel Solomons gazed one instant at the box—the precious box for whose contents he had risked, and was losing, everything. It went against the grain with him, white and palsied coward that he was that moment, to relinquish his hold of it even for one passing interval. But life was at stake, dear life itself, to which he clung in his craven dread, even more, if possible, than to his ill-gotten money. Lunging forward as the wave brought the great hull back again nearest to the boat, he flung the case with desperate aim into the stern, where it fell clattering at Mr. Solomons' feet. But the golden oppor-

tunity was now past and gone. Before the fisherman could fling the coil, the hull had rocked back again with the advancing wave, and it was only by backing water with all their might on a reflux side-current that the other men could hold off their boat from being hurled, a helpless walnut-shell, against the great retreating broadside. The wreck bore on upon the rocks, and Lionel Solomons went with it, now clinging desperately with both hands to that shattered taffrail.

‘Try once more,’ Mr. Solomons shouted, almost beside himself with excitement and anguish, and livid blue from chin to forehead. ‘A hundred pounds—two hundred pounds each man, if you save him! Leo, Leo, hold on to it still—wait for the next wave! We can come alongside again for you.’

The billow rolled back and the hull heeled over, careening in their direction. Once more the boatmen rowed hard against the recoiling undertow. For a moment, with incredible struggles, they held her within distance for throwing the coil.

‘ Catch it ! catch it and jump ! ’ Paul cried at the top of his voice.

Lionel Solomons, coming forward a third time with the careening hull, held out one despairing hand with a wild, clutching motion for the rope they flung him.

At that instant, while they looked for him to catch it and leap, a sudden and terrible change came over the miserable being’s distorted features. For the very first time he seemed to focus his sight deliberately on the people in the boat. His gaze fell full upon his uncle’s face. Their eyes met. Then Lionel’s moved hastily to Paul’s and the detective’s. There was a brief interval of doubt. He seemed to hesitate. Next instant the coil fell, unwinding itself, into the water by his side, not six inches short, and Lionel Solomons’ last chance was gone for ever.

Instead of leaning forward and catching it, he had flung up his arms wildly in the air as the coil approached him, and, shrieking out in a voice that could be heard above the crash of the breakers and the grinding jar

of the hull upon the rocks, 'O God! my uncle!' had let go his hold altogether upon the unsteady taffrail.

His sin had found him out. He dared not face the man he had so cruelly robbed of a life's savings.

Then, all of a sudden, as they held back the boat with the full force of six stalwart arms, they saw a great billow burst over the whole wreck tumultuously. As the foam cleared away and the water came pouring in wild cataracts over her side, they looked once more for their man upon the clean-swept deck. But they looked in vain. The taffrail was gone, and the skylights above the cabin.

And Lionel Solomons was no longer visible.

The great wave had swept him off, and was tossing and pounding him now upon the jagged peaks of granite.

Mr. Solomons fell back in his place at the stern. His colour was no longer blue, but deadly white, like Lionel's. Some awful revulsion had taken place within him. He bowed down his face between his hands like

a broken-hearted man, and rocked himself to and fro above his knees convulsively.

‘ And I drove him to his death !’ he cried, rocking himself still in unspeakable remorse and horror and anguish. ‘ I drove him to his death when I meant to save him !’

Seething inwardly in soul, Paul knew the old man had found out everything now. In that last awful moment, when the drowning nephew shrank, at the final gasp, from the uncle he had so cruelly and ungratefully robbed, it came in with a burst upon Mr. Solomons’ mind that it was Leo himself who had stolen the securities. It was Leo he had hounded and hunted down in the wreck. It was Leo he had confronted, like an evil conscience, in that last drowning agony. It was Leo for whom he had demanded with threats and curses fourteen years’ imprisonment ! The horror of it struck Mr. Solomons mute and dazed. He rocked himself up and down in a speechless conflict of emotion. He could neither cry nor groan nor call out now ; he could only gaze, blankly and awfully, at the white mist in front of him.

Leo had robbed him—Leo, for whom he had toiled and slave^d so long ! And he had tracked him down, unconsciously, unwittingly, till he made himself, against his will, Leo's executioner !

'We can do no more good here,' the detective murmured in low tones to Paul. 'I felt sure it was him, but I didn't like to say so. We may go ashore now. This 'ere arrest ain't going to be effected.'

'Row back !' Paul said. 'There's nobody else on the wreck. If we row ashore at once we can find out who's saved and how many are missing.'

They rowed ashore by the same long detour to avoid the reef, and saw the little cove now looming distinctly through the cold morning mist to the left before them. On the strip of shingle a crowd was drawn up, gathered together in knots around some dark unseen objects. They landed and approached, Mr. Solomons still white and almost rigid in the face, but walking blindly forward, as in a dream, or like some dazed and terrified dumb creature at bay in the market-place. Four or five corpses lay huddled upon the beach ;

some others the bystanders were trying rudely to revive, or were carrying between them, like logs, to the shelter of their cottages.

A group of dripping creatures sat apart, wringing their hands, or looking on with the stolid indifference of acute hopelessness. Among them was one in a pilot-coat whom some of the bystanders were regarding with supreme pity. 'Poor thing!' one woman said to Paul as they approached. 'She was married a-Saturday—and her husband's missing!'

Paul looked at her with an indefinable sense of profound distaste and loathing. The detective, who followed with the despatch-box still held tight in his hand, cast his eye upon her hard. 'I've got no warrant for arresting *her*,' he observed grimly, 'but she'd ought to be one of them.'

Mr. Solomons sat down upon the beach, quite motionless. He gazed away vaguely in the direction of the wreck. Presently a dark body appeared upon the crest of a long wave to seaward. One of the sailors, plunging boldly through the breakers upon a

recoiling wave, with a rope round his waist, struck out with brave arms in the direction of the body. Mr. Solomons watched with strangely passive interest. The sailor made straight for it, and grasped it by the hair—short, curly hair, black and clotted with the waves—and brought it back in tow as his companions pulled him by the rope over the crest of a big breaker. Mr. Solomons sat still and viewed it from afar. The face was battered out of all recognition and covered with blood, but the hands and the dress were beyond mistake. Three or four of the passengers gathered round it with awe-struck glances.

‘Hush, hush,’ they murmured. ‘Keep it from her for awhile. It’s poor Mr. Burton. His uncle’s here, they say—on the beach somewhere about. And there’s Mrs. Burton, sitting crying by the coastguard on the shingle over yonder.’

As the words fell on his ears and crushed the last grain of hope—that fatal alias telling him all the terrible story in full at once—Mr. Solomons rose and staggered blindly forward. Paul held his hand, for he thought

he would fall ; but Mr. Solomons walked erect and straight, though with reeling footsteps like one crushed and paralyzed. He knelt beside the body, and bent over it tenderly. The tears were in his eyes, but they didn't drop.

'Oh, Leo, my boy !' he cried ; 'oh, Leo, Leo, Leo ! why didn't you ask me for it ? Why didn't you ask me ? You had but to ask, and you knew it was yours ! Oh, Leo, Leo, Leo ! why need you do it like this ? You've killed yourself, my boy, and you've broken my heart for me !'

At the words, Madame Ceriolo rushed forward with a magnificent burst of theatrical anguish. She flung herself upon the body passionately, like a skilled actress that she was, and took the dead hand in hers and kissed it twice over. But Mr. Solomons pushed her aside with unconscious dignity.

'Not now,' he said calmly ; 'not now, if you please. He's mine, not yours. *I* would never have left him. I will care for him still. Go back to your seat, woman !'

And he bent once more, heart-broken, over the prostrate body.

Madame Ceriolo slunk back aghast, into the circle of spectators. She buried her face in her hands, and cried aloud in her misery.

But the old man knelt there, long and motionless, just gazing blankly at that battered corpse, and murmuring to himself in half-inarticulate tones, 'Leo, Leo, Leo ! To think I should have killed you ! You had but to ask, and you knew it was yours, my boy. Why didn't you ask ? Oh, why didn't you ask me ?'

CHAPTER XLIII.

RELICT OF THE LATE LIONEL SOLOMONS.

THEY waited on at Lizard Town till after the funeral. Mr. Solomons, in a certain dazed and dogged fashion, went through with it all, making his arrangements for a costly Cornish serpentine monument with a short inscription in memory of Leo, to the outward eye almost as if nothing very much out of the way had happened. But Paul, looking below the surface, could easily see that in his heart of hearts the poor broken old money-lender was utterly crushed and shattered by this terrible disillusionment. It wasn't merely the loss of his nephew that weighed down his gray hairs—though that in itself would have gone far to break him—it was the shame and disgrace of his crime and his

ingratitude, the awful awakening that overtook him so suddenly in the boat that morning. He could hardly even wish his nephew alive again, knowing him now exactly for what he was ; yet the way he leant over the coffin where that bruised and battered face lay white and still in its still white grave-clothes, muttering 'Leo, Leo,' to himself as he gazed on it, was painfully pathetic for anyone to look upon. Paul knew that the old man's life was clean cut away from under him. The end for which he had laboured so hard and so sternly for so many years was removed at one swoop from his path in life ; and the very remembrance of it now was a pang and a humiliation to him.

Paul observed, however, that in the midst of this unspeakable domestic tragedy Mr. Solomons seemed to decline upon his shoulder for aid, and to trust and confide in him with singular unreserve, even more fully than heretofore. On the very evening of Leo's funeral, indeed, as he sat alone in his own room at the Lizard Hotel, Mr. Solomons came to him with that white and impassive face he had preserved ever since the morning

of the wreck, and, beckoning to him with his hand, said, in an ominous tone of too collected calmness, 'Come into my room, Sir Paul; that woman is coming to speak with me to-night, and I want you to be by to hear whatever she may have to tell me.'

Paul rose in silence, much exercised in soul. He had fears of his own as to how Madame Ceriolo's story might further lacerate the poor old man's torn heart; but he went reluctantly. Madame Ceriolo had stopped on at the Lizard, meanwhile, partly because she felt herself compelled in common decency to wait where she was till Leo was buried, but partly also because she wanted to know how much, if anything, Leo's widow might still hope to extract out of old Cento-Cento's well-filled pockets. She had stood ostentatiously that day beside Lionel Solomons' open grave with much display of that kind of grief betokened by copious use of a neat cambric pocket-handkerchief with a coronet in the corner; and she was very well satisfied when, in the evening, Mr. Solomons sent a curiously-worded card to her in her own room:

'If you will step into my parlour for half

an hour's talk, about eight o'clock, I wish to speak with you.'

The little adventuress came in to the minute, with very red eyes, and with such an attempt at impromptu mourning as her hasty researches among the Helston shops had already allowed her to improvise for the occasion. Her get up, under the circumstances, was strictly irreproachable. She looked the very picture of inconsolable grief, not wholly unmingled with a sad state of pecuniary destitution. It disconcerted her a little when she saw Paul, too, was to be included in the family party—he knew too much to be quite agreeable to her—but she quickly recovered her equanimity on that score, and appealed to 'Sir Paul' with simple womanly eloquence as an old Mentone friend, the very person who had been the means of first introducing her to her own dear Lionel. Mr. Solomons listened with grimly imperious face.

'What I want to hear,' he said at last, fairly confronting the little woman with his sternly critical eye, 'is, What do you know about this dreadful business?'

‘What business?’ Madame Ceriolo asked, with a little tearful astonishment.

Mr. Solomons eyed her again even more sternly than before.

‘You know very well what business,’ he retorted with some scorn. ‘Don’t make an old man go over his shame again, woman. By this time all Cornwall has heard it from the detective, no doubt. If you pretend not to know you’ll only exasperate me. Let’s be plain with one another. Your best chance in this matter is to be perfectly straightforward.’

His tone took Madame Ceriolo completely by surprise. She had never before in her life been placed in a position where her little feminine wiles and pretences proved utterly useless. She gasped for breath for a second, and stared blankly at the stern old man, out of whom this terrible episode seemed to have driven for ever all the genuine kernel of geniality and kindness. Paul was truly sorry for her mute embarrassment.

‘I—I—don’t know what you mean,’ she answered at last, leaning back in her chair and bursting into real, irrepressible, womanly

tears. 'I thought you wanted to speak to me as Lionel's widow.'

Mr. Solomons let her lean back and cry till she was tired. Meanwhile he stood and eyed her with undisguised grinness.

'As soon as you're capable of reasonable talk,' he said at last, in a cold, clear tone, 'I have some questions to ask you. Answer them plainly if you want attention.'

Madame Ceriolo stifled her sobs with an effort, and dried her eyes. She was really and truly frightened now. She saw she had made a false step—perhaps an irretrievable one—or, rather, she saw that the wreck and discovery and Lionel's death had so completely upset all her well-laid plans for her future in life that retreat in any direction was well-nigh impossible. She was the victim of contingencies, sacrificed by fate on the altar of the unforeseen. She composed herself, however, with what grace she might, and answered bravely, through the ghost of a sob, but in a creditably firm voice, that she was quite prepared now to consider any questions Mr. Solomons might put to her.

Mr. Solomons, sitting there, wrecked and unmanned himself, began once more in a mood of hollow calmness :

‘ You say you come as Lionel’s widow. Is that true, in the first place ? Were you ever married to him ? If so, when, where, and what evidence have you ? ’

With the conscious pride of the virtuous British matron at last achieved, Madame Ceriolo drew from her pocket an official-looking paper, which she handed across at once for Mr. Solomons’ inspection.

‘ There’s my marriage-certificate,’ she said simply, ‘ saved from the wreck.’ She felt she was scoring. The old man had miscalculated and misunderstood her character.

Mr. Solomons scanned it close and hard.

‘ This seems perfectly correct,’ he said at last, in his cold, stern tone. ‘ I can find no mistake in it. My poor boy’s signature, firm and clear as ever. And on Saturday last, too ! Oh, God ! the shame of it ! ’

Madame Ceriolo bowed and answered nothing.

Mr. Solomons gazed at it and sighed three times. Then he looked up once more with

a fiercely scrutinizing look at the strange woman.

‘Lionel Solomons,’ he murmured half to himself, perusing the marriage-lines through his slowly-rolling tears—‘Lionel Solomons. My poor boy’s own signature—Lionel Solomons. No deception there. All plain and aboveboard.’

Then he raised his face, and met Madame Ceriolo’s eyes with sudden vehement inquiry.

‘But you called yourselves Burton on board,’ he continued fiercely. ‘You were Mrs. Burton, you know, to your fellow-passengers. Why did you do that, if you were all so innocent?’

The unexpectedness of the question took Madame’s breath away once more. A second time she broke down and began to cry. Paul looked across at her with genuine sympathy. No young man, at least, can bear to see tears in a pretty woman’s eyes, rightly or wrongfully. But Mr. Solomons felt no such human weakness. He paused as before, rhadamantine in his severity, and awaited her restoration to a rational and col-

lected frame of mind for undergoing further cross-examination. Madame cried on silently for a moment or so, and then dried her tears.

‘You’re very cruel,’ she murmured sobbing, ‘so soon after poor dear Lionel’s death, too! You’re very, very cruel!’

Mr. Solomons waved his hand impatiently on one side.

‘You lured him to his death,’ he answered with grim, retributive sternness. ‘No talk like that, if you please. It only aggravates me. I mean to do what I think is just, if you’ll answer my questions truly and simply. I ask you again: Why, if you please, did you call yourself Burton?’

‘Poor Leo told me to,’ Madame sobbed, quite nonplussed.

‘Did he explain his reasons?’ Mr. Solomons persisted.

‘N—not exactly. . . . He said he must go *incognito* to South America. . . . I thought he might have business reasons of his own. . . . I come of a noble Tyrolese family myself. I don’t understand business.’

‘Nonsense!’ Mr. Solomons answered with crushing promptitude. ‘Don’t talk like that. Sherrard, my detective, has got up the case against you. Here are his telegrams from town, and, if I chose, I could prosecute; but for Leo’s sake—for Leo’s memory’s sake—I prefer to leave it.’ He faltered for a moment. ‘I couldn’t have Leo’s name dragged through the mud in the Courts,’ he went on, with a melting inflection in his stern voice; ‘and for his sake—for dead Leo’s sake—I’ve induced Sherrard and the Scotland Yard people not to proceed for the present against you. But that’s all lies. You know it’s lies. You’re the daughter of an Italian organ-grinder, born in a court off Saffron Lane, and your mother was a ballet-girl at Drury Lane Theatre.’

Madame bowed her head and wept silently once more.

‘You—you’re a cruel, hard man,’ she murmured half inaudibly.

But Mr. Solomons had screwed his righteous indignation up to sticking-point now, and was not to be put down by such feminine blandishments. ‘You’re a grown

woman, too,' he went on, staring hard in her face and flinging out his words at her with angry precision. 'You're a woman of the world, and you're forty, if you're a day—though you've falsely put yourself down in the marriage-lines as twenty-eight—and you know as well as I do that you're not so innocent and trustful and confiding as all that comes to; you perfectly well understood why . . . my poor boy wanted to give himself a false name on board the *Dom Pedro*. You perfectly well understood why he wanted to rob me; and you egged him on, you egged him on to it. If you hadn't egged him on, he'd never have done it. My poor Leo was far too clever a lad to do such a foolish thing as that—except with a woman driving him. There's nothing on earth a man won't do when a woman like you once fairly gets hold of him. It's *you* that have done it all; it's you that are guiltiest; it's you that have robbed me of my money—and of Leo.'

Madame Ceriolo cowered with her face in her hands, but answered nothing. Clever woman as she was, and swift to do evil, she

was still no match for an old man's fiery indignation.

'But you did worse than that,' Mr. Solomons went on, after a brief pause, like an accusing angel—'you did worse than that. For all that, I might, perhaps, in the end forgive you. But what else you did I can never forgive. In the last hour of all you basely deserted him!'

Madame Ceriolo raised her head and stared him wildly back. 'No, I didn't,' she cried in anger. 'I didn't, I didn't!'

Mr. Solomons rose and looked down upon her with scorn. 'More lies,' he answered contemptuously. 'More lies still, woman. Those who were with you on the steamer that night have told me all. Don't try to deceive me. When you saw all hope was gone, you left him to his fate, and thought only of saving your own wretched life—you miserable creature! You left him to drown. You know you left him.'

'He *would* go back to his cabin to fetch his valuables!' Madame Ceriolo moaned. 'It wasn't my fault. I tried to dissuade him.'

‘Lies!’ Mr. Solomons answered once more with astonishing vehemence. ‘You let him go willingly. You abetted him in his errand. You wanted to be rid of him. And as soon as he was gone, you tried to save yourself by jumping into a boat. I have found out everything. You missed your jump, and were carried off by the wave. But you never waited or cared to know what had become of Leo. Your one thought was for your own miserable neck, you Delilah!’

Madame Ceriolo plunged her face in her hands afresh, and still answered nothing. She must hold her tongue for prudence’ sake, lest speech should undo her. The old man had spoken of doing what was just. There were still hopes he might relent to some practical purpose. It was best not to reply and needlessly irritate him. So she sobbed mutely on, and waited for a turn in the tide of his emotions.

For many minutes Mr. Solomons went on talking, explaining, partly to her and partly to Paul, who looked on somewhat horrified, the nature of the whole conspiracy, as he

understood it, and Madame still cowered and shook with sobbing. At last Mr. Solomons paused, and allowed her to recover her equanimity a little. Then he began once more, eyeing her sternly as ever. 'And now, woman,' he said, 'if I'd only wanted to tell you all this I wouldn't have sent for you at all this evening. But I wished also to give you a chance of explaining, if explanation was possible, before I decided. You take refuge in lies, and will explain nothing. So I know the worst I believe is true. You concocted this plan, and when you found it was failing, you basely tried to desert my poor Lionel. . . . Very well; on that score I owe you nothing but fourteen years' imprisonment with hard labour. Still, I loved Lionel; and I can never forget that you are Lionel's widow. This paper you give me shows me you were his wife—a pitiful wife for such a man as my Lionel! But he made you his wife, and I respect his decision. As long as you live I shall pay you an allowance of two hundred a year. I will give a lump sum that will bring in that much to the Jewish Board of Guardians of London: they

shall hold it in trust for you during your life, and on your death it will revert to the poor of my own people. . . . If ever you'd told me you'd wanted to marry Leo you'd have been richer far—a great deal richer than even Leo suspected—for I've done well for myself in life: for Leo—for Leo. But you chose to go to work the underhand way, and that shall be your penalty. You may know what you've lost. Never come near my sight again. Never write to me or communicate with me in any way hereafter. Never dare to obtrude yourself on my eyes for a moment. But take your two hundred. . . . Take them and go away. . . . Do you accept my conditions ?

Madame felt there was no use in further pretences now. 'I do,' she answered calmly, drying her reddened eyes with surprising ease. 'Two hundred a year for life, payable quarterly ?'

Mr. Solomons nodded. 'Just so,' he said. 'Now go, woman.'

Madame Ceriolo hesitated. 'This has been a curious interview,' she said, staring round and mincing a little, 'and Sir Paul

Gascoyne and you will go away, perhaps, and take advantage of my silence to say to other people——'

Mr. Solomons cut her short with a terrible look. 'I would never soil my lips with mentioning your name again,' he cried out angrily. 'You are dead to me for ever. I've done with you now. And as for Sir Paul Gascoyne—why, miserable creature that you are—don't you even know when you have a gentleman to deal with?'

Madame Ceriolo bowed, and retreated tily. It was an awkward interview, to be sure; but, after all, two hundred a year for life is always something. And she thought that she could really and truly trust to the scallywag's innocence: he was one of those simple-minded, foolish young men, don't you know, who have queer ideas of their own about the sacredness of honour!

CHAPTER XLIV.

‘A MODERN MIRACLE.’

ONE other curious thing happened before they left Cornwall. At breakfast next morning, as they sat moody and taciturn—for Mr. Solomons didn't greatly care to talk, nor Paul to break in upon his companion's blank misery—the elder man suddenly interrupted the even flow of their silence by saying with a burst, ‘I think Miss Blair lives in Cornwall.’

‘She does,’ Paul answered, starting, and completely taken aback, for he had no idea Mr. Solomons even knew of his Nea's existence. Then, after a slight pause, he added shyly, ‘She lives near Fowey.’

‘We passed the junction station on our

way down, I noticed,' Mr. Solomons went on in a measured voice.

'Yes,' Paul replied, surprised once more that the old man had observed it. Young people always imagine their little love-affairs entirely escape the eyes of their elders. Which is absurd. As a matter of fact, everybody discovers them.

'We shall pass it again on our way back,' Mr. Solomons went on, in that weary, dreary, dead-alive tone in which he had said everything since Lionel's death and his terrible awakening.

'Naturally,' Paul answered, looking up in amaze, and much wondering whither this enigmatic conversation tended.

Mr. Solomons paused, and looked over towards him kindly. 'Paul, my boy,' he said, with a little tremor in his throat—'you'll excuse my calling you Paul now, as I used to do in the old days, you know—Paul, my boy, it seems a pity, now you're so near, you shouldn't drop in as you pass and see her.'

Paul let his fork drop in blank astonishment. To be sure, he had thought as much

a dozen times himself, but he had never dared to envisage it as practically possible.

‘How good of you to think of it—and now especially!’ he exclaimed with genuine gratitude.

Mr. Solomons drew himself up stiffly, and froze at once. ‘I was thinking,’ he said, ‘that, as a matter of business, it might be well if you got that question about marrying settled some day, one way or the other. I regarded it only in the light of my own interests—the interests of the Jewish widows and orphans. They’re all I have left to work for now; but you don’t get rid of the habits of a lifetime in a day; and I shall look after their money as I looked after—Lionel’s. It’s become an instinct with me. Now, you see, Sir Paul, I’ve got a vested interest, so to speak, in your future—it’s mortgaged to me, in fact, as you know; and I must do my best by it. If you won’t marry the sort of lady I expected you to marry, and had a claim to believe you’d try to marry, in my interest—at least don’t let me be a loser by your remaining single. I’ve always considered that being in love’s a

very bad thing indeed for a man's business prospects. It upsets his mind, and prevents him from concentrating himself body and soul on the work he has in hand. A man who has to make his own way in the world, therefore, ought to do one of two things. Either he should avoid falling in love at all, which is much the safest plan—I followed it myself—or else, if he can't do that, he should marry, out of hand, and be able to devote himself thenceforward unreservedly to business.'

Paul could hardly help smiling at this intensely practical view of the situation, in spite of the cold air of utter despondency with which Mr. Solomons delivered it'; but he answered with as grave a face as he could, 'I think myself it may act the other way—as a spur and incentive to further exertion.'

'No,' Mr. Solomons retorted firmly. 'In your case, no. If you waited to marry till you'd cleared off your debt, you'd lose heart at once. As a security for myself, I advise you to marry as soon as ever the lady 'll take you.'

‘And yet,’ Paul answered, ‘it was consideration for your claims that made us both feel it was utterly hopeless.’

‘Exactly so,’ Mr. Solomons replied, in the same cold, hard voice. ‘That’s just where it is. What chance have I got of ever seeing my money back again—my hard-saved money, that I advanced for your education and to make a gentleman of you—if you begin by falling in love with a penniless girl, and feeling, both of you, that it’s utterly hopeless? Is that the kind of mood that makes a man fit for earning and saving money, I ask you?’

‘I’m afraid not,’ Paul answered penitently.

‘And I’m afraid not, either,’ Mr. Solomons went on, with icy sternness. ‘You’ve paid up regularly so far—that I admit in justice: and, mind, I shall expect you to pay up just as regularly in future. Don’t suppose for a moment I won’t look after the Jewish widows’ and orphans’ interests as carefully as ever I looked after poor Leo’s. You’ve got into the debt with your eyes open, and you’ve got to get out of it now as best you

can.' (Paul, listening aghast, felt that his disillusionment had hardened Mr. Solomons terribly.) 'And the only thing I can see for you to do is to put the boldest face upon it at once, and marry this young lady.'

'You think so?' Paul asked timidly, half wishing he could see things in the same light.

'Yes, I do,' Mr. Solomons replied, with snappish promptitude. 'I look at it this way: You can keep your wife for very little more than it costs you to keep yourself; and your talents will be set free for your work alone. You could teach her to help you copy your manuscripts or work a typewriter. I believe you'd earn twice as much in the end, if you married her for a typewriter, and you'd pay me off a great deal faster.'

'Well, I'll think about it,' Paul answered.

'Don't think about it,' Mr. Solomons replied with curt incisiveness. 'In business, thinking's the thief of opportunity. It's prompt decision that wins the prize. Stop at Fowey this very afternoon and talk it over offhand with the lady and her father.'

And so, to his own immense surprise, almost before he'd time to realize the situation, Paul found himself, by three o'clock that day, knocking at the door of Mr. Blair's rectory.

He knocked with a good deal of timorous hesitation ; for though, to be sure, he had sent on a telegram to announce his coming to Nea, he was naturally so modest and diffident a young man that he greatly feared his reception by Nea's father. Fathers are always such hard nuts to tackle. Indeed, to say the truth, Paul was even now, in spite of experience, slow to perceive the difference in his position made by his accession to the dignity of the baronetcy. No doubt, every day would serve to open his eyes more to the real state of the case in this important particular ; but each such discovery stood alone, as it were, on its own ground, and left him almost as nervous as ever before each new situation, and almost as much surprised when that social 'Open sesame !' once more succeeded in working its familiar wonders.

Any doubt he might have felt, however,

disappeared almost at once when Nea in person, more visibly agitated than he had ever yet beheld her, opened the door for him, and when her father, with profuse hospitality, instead of regarding him as a dangerous intruder, expressed with much warmth his profound regret that Sir Paul couldn't stop the night at the rectory. Nay, more, that prudent father took special care they should all go out into the garden for the brief interview, and that he himself should keep at a safe distance with a convenient sister-in-law, pacing the lawn, while Paul and Nea walked on in front and discoursed—presumably—about the flowers in the border.

Thus brought face to face with the future, Paul briefly explained to Nea Mr. Solomons' new point of view, and the question which it left open so clearly before them.

Now, Nea was young, but Nea was a rock of practical common-sense, as your good and impulsive West Country girl is often apt to be. Instead of jumping foolishly at Mr. Solomons' proposal because it offered a loophole for immediate marriage, as you or I would have done, she answered at once,

with judicious wisdom, that, much as she loved Paul, and much as she longed for that impossible day to arrive when they two might be one, she couldn't bear, even with Mr. Solomons' consent, so far to burden Paul's already too heavily mortgaged future.

'Paul!' she said, trembling, for it was a hard wrench, 'if I loved you less, I might perhaps say *yes*; but I love you so much that I must still say *no* to you. Perhaps some day you may make a great hit—and then you could wipe off all your burdens at once—and then, dear, we too could be happy together. But, till then, I love you too well to add to your anxieties. I know there's some truth in what Mr. Solomons says; but it's only half a truth if you examine it closely. When I look forward and think of the long struggle it would bring you, and the weary days of working at your desk, and the fears and anxieties, I can't bear to face it. We must wait and hope still, Paul: after all, it looks a little nearer now than when you said good-bye to me that day at Oxford!'

Paul looked down at the gravel-path with a certain shock of momentary disappointment. He had expected all this; indeed, if Nea hadn't said it, he would have thought the less of her; and yet, for all that, he was disappointed.

'It seems such an interminable time to wait,' he said, with a rising lump in his throat. 'I know you're right—I felt sure you'd say so—but, still, it's hard to put it off again, Nea. When Mr. Solomons spoke to me I half felt it was best to do as he said. But now you've put it as you put it just now, I feel I've no right to impose the strain upon you, dearest.'

'Some day something will turn up,' Nea answered hopefully—for Paul's sake—lest she should wholly crush him. 'I can wait for you for ever, Paul. If you love me, that's enough. And it's a great thing that I can write to you, and that my letters cheer you.'

Nevertheless, it was with a somewhat heavy heart that Paul rejoined Mr. Solomons at Par Junction that evening, feeling that he must still wait, as before, for some indefinite future.

'Well, what have you arranged?' Mr. Solomons asked, with a certain shadow of interest rare with him these last days, as he advanced to greet him.

'Oh, nothing!' Paul answered blankly. 'Miss Blair says we oughtn't to get married while I'm so much burdened; and I didn't think it would be right on her account to urge her to share my burdens under such peculiar circumstances. You see, I've her interests as well as yours to think about.'

Mr. Solomons glanced hard at him with a suspicious look. For a second his lips parted, irresolute, as if he half intended to say something important. Then they shut again close, like an iron trap, with that cold, hard look now fixed sternly upon them.

'I shall lose my money,' he said curtly. 'I shall never be paid as long as I live. You'll do no proper work with that girl on your brain. But no matter—no matter. The Jewish widows and orphans won't lose in the end. I can trust you to work your fingers to the bone rather than leave a penny unpaid, however long it may take you. And

mark you, Sir Paul, as you and the young lady won't follow my advice, I expect you to do it, too—I expect you to do it.'

Paul bowed his head to his taskmaster.

'I will pay you every penny, Mr. Solomons,' he said, 'if I work myself to death with it.'

The old man's face grew harder and colder still.

'Well, mind you do it quick,' he said testily. 'I haven't got long left to live now, and I don't want to be kept out of my money for ever.'

But at the rectory near Fowey, if Paul could only have seen the profoundly affectionate air with which, the moment his back was turned, Mr. Blair threw his arm round his daughter's neck, and inquired eagerly, 'Well, what did Sir Paul say to you, Nea?'—even he would have laughed at his own timid fears anent the bearding of that alarming animal, the British father, in his own rectorial lair in Cornwall. And had he further observed the dejected surprise with which Mr. Blair received Nea's guarded report of their brief interview, he would have

wondered to himself how he could ever have overlooked the mollifying influence on the paternal heart of that magical sound, 'Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet.'

For Mr. Blair heaved a deep sigh as he heard it, and murmured softly to himself:

'He seems a most worthy, high-minded, well-principled young man. I wish we could help him out of his difficulties, anyhow.'

CHAPTER XLV.

PRESSURE AND TENSION.

A YEAR passed away—a long, long year of twelve whole weary months—during which many small but important incidents happened to Paul and to Nea also.

For one thing, a few days after Paul's return to town, Mr. Solomons dropped in one afternoon at the young man's chambers in the little lane off Gower Street. The week had aged him much. A settled gloom brooded over his face, and that stern look about the corners of his mouth seemed more deeply ingrained in its very lines than ever. His hair was grayer and his eyes less keen. But, strange to say, the blue tint had faded wholly from his lips, and his cheeks bore less markedly the signs of that weakness of the

heart which some short time before had been so painfully apparent. He sat down moodily in Paul's easy-chair, and drew forth a folded sheet of official-looking paper from his inner breast-pocket.

'Sir Paul,' he said, bending forward, with less of familiarity and more coldness than usual, 'I've brought up this paper here for you to take care of. I've brought it to you rather than to anybody else because I believe I can really trust you. After the blow I've received—and how terrible a blow it was no man living will ever know, for I'm of the sort that these things affect internally—after the blow I've received, perhaps I'm a fool to trust any man. But I think not. I think I know you. As I said to that miserable woman the other evening, one ought at least to know when one has a gentleman to deal with.'

Paul bowed his head with a faint blush of modesty at so much commendation from Mr. Solomons.

'It's very good of you,' he said, 'to think so well of me. I hope, Mr. Solomons, I shall always be able to deserve your confidence.'

Mr. Solomons glanced up suspiciously once more.

‘I hope so,’ he said in a very dry voice. ‘I hope you won’t forget that a debt’s a debt, whether it’s owed to poor Leo and me or to the Metropolitan Jewish Widows and Orphans. Well, that’s neither here nor there. What I want you to do to-day is to look at this will—circumstances have compelled me to make a new one—and to see whether it meets with your approbation.’

Paul took the paper with a faint smile and read it carefully through. It resembled the former one in most particulars, except, of course, for the entire omission of Lionel’s name in the list of bequests; but it differed in two or three minor points. The bulk of Mr. Solomons’ fortune was now left, in trust, to the Jewish Board of Guardians; and the notes and acceptances of Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, were specially mentioned by name among the effects bequeathed to those worthy gentlemen, to be employed for the good of the Metropolitan Hebrew community. Mention was also made of a certain sum, already paid over in trust to the Board

for the benefit of Maria Agnese Solomons, widow of Lionel Solomons, deceased, which was to revert on the death of the said Maria Agnese to the General Trust, and be employed by the Guardians for the same purposes. There was a special bequest of ten pounds to Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, for a mourning ring; and a similar bequest to Faith, wife of Charles Thistleton, Esquire, and one of the testator's most esteemed friends. But beyond that small testimony of regard there was little to interest Paul in the document. He handed it back with a smile to Mr. Solomons, and said shortly, 'I think there's nothing to object to in any part of it. It was kind of you to remember myself and my sister.'

Mr. Solomons' eyes looked him through and through.

'I want you to take care of it,' he said abruptly.

'I will,' Paul answered. 'But I would like first to ask you just one favour.'

'What's that?' Mr. Solomons asked sharply.

'If I can succeed in paying you off during

—well, during your own lifetime, will you kindly remove the mention of my notes and acceptances? I wouldn't like them to be noticed in the papers, if possible.'

'I will,' Mr. Solomons answered, looking at him harder than ever. 'Sir Paul, you're a very honourable young man.'

'Thank you,' Paul replied. 'You are always very good to me.'

'They don't all talk like that!' Mr. Solomons retorted, with temper. 'They mostly call me a "damned old Jew." That's generally all the praise a man gets for helping people out of their worst difficulties.'

And he left the will with Paul with many strict injunctions to keep it safe, and to take care nobody ever had a chance of meddling with it.

In the course of the year, too, Paul was very successful in his literary ventures. Work flowed in faster than he could possibly do it. That's the luck of the trade: sometimes the deserving man plods on unrecognised till he's nearly fifty before anybody hears of him; sometimes editors seem to hunt out with a rush the merest beginner

who shows promise or performance. It's all a lottery, and Paul happened to be one of the lucky few who draw winning numbers. Perhaps that magical suffix of 'Bart.' stood here, too, in good stead; perhaps his own merits secured him custom; but, at any rate, he wrote hopefully to Nea, if health and strength kept up, he could get as many engagements now as ever he wanted.

Health and strength, however, were severely tried in the effort to fulfil Mr. Solomons' exacting requirements. Paul worked early and late, at the hardest of all trades (for if you think literature is mere play, dear sir or madam, you're profoundly mistaken); and he saved too much out of food and lodging in order to meet as many as possible of those hateful notes from quarter to quarter. Mr. Solomons himself remonstrated at times; he complained that Paul, by starving himself and working too hard, was running the risk in the long-run of defrauding his creditor. 'For all that, you know,' he said demonstratively, 'your health and strength's my only security. Of course there's the insurance; that's all right if you

die outright; but literary men who break down don't generally die: they linger on for ever, a burden to their friends or the parish, with nervous diseases. As a duty to me, Sir Paul, and to the Metropolitan Widows and Orphans, you ought to feed yourself better and take more rest. I don't mean to say I don't like to see a young man working hard and paying up regular; that's only honest; but what I say is this: there's moderation in all things. It isn't fair to me, you see, to run the risk of laying yourself up before you've paid it all off to the last farthing.'

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Mr. Solomons received Paul's hard-earned money with a certain close-fisted joy which sometimes shocked, and even surprised, his simple-hearted young debtor. To say the truth, the miserly instinct in Mr. Solomons, kept somewhat in check by many better feelings during Mr. Lionel's lifetime, seemed now completely to have gained the upper hand in his cramped and narrowed later nature. They say the ruling passions grow fiercer in old age; doubtless they are wrong; but in

Mr. Solomons' case the proverbial paradox had at least a certain external semblance of justification. Quarter after quarter, as Paul paid in his instalments of principal and interest, the old man grumbled over and over again at the insufficiency of the amount and the slowness of the repayment. Yet what seemed to Paul strangest of all was the apparent contradiction that while Mr. Solomons thus perpetually urged him by implication to work harder and harder, he was at the same time for ever urging him in so many words to take more holiday and spend more money and time on food and pleasure. Not that Mr. Solomons ever put these requests upon sympathethic grounds: he always based them solely and wholly on considerations of his own interest. 'If you don't take more care of yourself,' he would often say, with that cold, stern face unchanged for one moment, 'you'll make yourself ill, and go off into a nervous wreck, and come upon the parish—and then what'll become of all the money I've advanced you ?'

'I can't help it,' Paul would answer. 'I feel I must, somehow; I can never rest till

I've cleared it all off, and am my own master.'

'I know what that means,' Mr. Solomons said once, near the end of the year, when autumn was coming round again. 'You're in a hurry to marry this young lady down in Cornwall. Ah, that's just the way of all you borrowing people. You enter into contracts with one man first, for money down, his own hard-saved money, that he's made and hoarded; and then, when you've eaten and drunk it all up, you go and fall in love with some girl you've never seen in your lives before, and for her sake, a stranger's sake, you forget all about your vested obligations. I wish you'd take my advice and marry the young woman out of hand. I'd be all the safer in the end to get my money.'

Paul shook his head.

'I can't bear to,' he said, 'and even if I would, Miss Blair wouldn't. She said herself she'd never burden my life any further. I must work on now to the bitter end, and in the course of years, perhaps, I may be able to marry her.'

'In the course of years!' Mr. Solomons

echoed fretfully. 'In the course of years indeed! And do you think, then, I'm going to live on for ever? No, no; I want to see some pleasure and satisfaction out of my money in my own lifetime. I'm not going to stand this sort of thing much longer. You ought to marry her, and settle down in life to do better work. If you'd get a house of your own now, with Lady Gascoyne at the head of your table, and could give dinners, and invite the world, and take your proper part in London society, you'd soon be coining money—a man of your brains, with no home to entertain in! You're keeping me out of my own—that's just what I call it.'

'I'm sorry I disappoint you, Mr. Solomons,' Paul answered sadly; 'but I'm afraid I can't help it. I can never marry till I'm independent.'

Mr. Solomons rose and moved to the door.

'I must put a stop to this nonsense,' he murmured resolutely. 'I can't let this sort of thing go on much longer. If I have to put the Courts in action to get what I want,

I must put a stop before another week to this confounded nonsense.'

'Put the Courts in action!' Paul cried, aghast at the ugly phrase. 'Oh no, Mr. Solomons, you can never mean that! You won't expose an old friend, who has always tried his best to repay you for all your kindness, to so much unpleasantness. I'll do anything—in reason—to prevent such a contingency.'

But Mr. Solomons only gazed back at him with that inquiring glance. Then he drew himself up and said with a stony face:

'Sir Paul Gascoyne, I've always said you were a gentleman. I hope you won't compel me to be too hard upon you. I hope you'll think it over, and see your way to marry the lady.'

Paul flung himself back in his easy-chair as Mr. Solomons closed the door behind him, and felt for once in his life very bitterly against his old benefactor, as he had always considered him. He was half inclined, in that moment of pique, to take him at his word, and to beg and implore Nea to marry him immediately.

As for Mr. Solomons, in his lonely room at Hillborough that night, he sat down by himself, with a resolute air, to write two letters which he hoped might influence his recalcitrant debtor. He wrote them in a firm, clear hand, little shaky with age, and read them over more than once to himself, admiring his own persuasive eloquence. Then he put them into two envelopes, and duly directed them. The superscription of one was to the Rev. Walter Blair, The Rectory, Lanhydran, near Fowey, Cornwall. That of the other was to Mrs. Charles Thistleton, Wardlaw House, The Parks, Sheffield. And what specially impelled him to write this last was the fact that Miss Nea Blair was at that moment in the North, on a long-promised visit to Sir Paul's sister.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A TRANSACTION IN DIAMONDS.

THREE days later Mr. Solomons happened to have business in town which took him up into Cheapside on a very unwonted shopping expedition. Mr. Solomons, in fact, was bent on the purchase of jewellery.

He had been more particularly driven to this novel pursuit by the simultaneous receipt of two letters from two opposite ends of England on that self-same morning. One of them bore the Fowey postmark; the other, addressed in a feminine hand, was dated 'Sheffield.' Mr. Solomons smiled somewhat grimly to himself as he read this last. 'Eighteen months of wealth and prosperity have strangely developed our old friend, Faith,' he thought in his own

soul. 'How glibly she talks about money now, as if it was water ! She doesn't seem to think much about Sir Paul's difficulties. They vanish far more easily in her mind to-day than in the hard old days down at Plowden's Court in Hillborough.'

But Mr. Solomons was too much of a philosopher in his way to let this natural evolution of the female mind disturb for a moment his sombre equanimity. Men, he knew, rise sometimes to the occasion ; women, always. So he went on his way to London with that settled solid calm of a life that has now no hope left in it, and that goes on upon its dull routine by pure mechanical habit.

Nevertheless, that habit was the habit of a lifetime devoted to making and saving money. In dealing with a debtor and in haggling with a seller, Mr. Solomons' soul was still as keen as ever. He watched over the interests of the Jewish widows and orphans as closely as ever in happier times he had watched over his own and Leo's. A gain or loss of sixpence still seemed to him a matter well worth struggling over ; a rise or

fall of one-eighth per cent. on the market-price of Portuguese Threes still put his over-worked heart into a flutter of excitement. It was with judicious care, therefore, that he selected for his patronage the shop of a fellow-tribesman in a street off Cheapside, and proceeded to effect a suitable bargain in jewellery.

The utter downfall of a life's dream would have made most men wholly careless as to anything like money matters. It had only made Mr. Solomons closer-fisted than ever.

'I should like,' Mr. Solomons said, as he entered the shop, and addressed himself with severity to the smug-faced and black-whiskered young man at the counter—'I should like to see a diamond necklet.'

'Yes, sir. About what price, sir?' the smug-faced young man replied briskly.

Mr. Solomons looked him through and through with a contemptuous air. 'The price,' he answered sententiously, 'depends as a rule to some extent upon the quality.'

'Merely as a guide to the class of goods I should first submit to you,' the smug-faced young man went on, still more briskly than

before. 'Our immense stock! The variety of our patterns! The difficulty of a selection!'

'Do you take me for a fool, young man?' Mr. Solomons retorted severely, eyeing him askance. 'Nobody has an immense stock of diamond necklets, ready-made. Show me your goods first, and I'll make my choice. After that, we'll arrive at an arrangement as to value.'

'I think, Mr. Nathan,' the proprietor observed to the smug-faced young man, who fell back crestfallen, 'I'd better attend to this gentleman myself.' For he plainly foresaw hard bargaining. 'I've met you before, sir, I believe,' he went on. 'Mr. Solomons of Hillborough?'

Mr. Solomons nodded.

'My name, sir,' he answered. 'I was recommended here by our mutual friend, Mocatta. And I want to see some diamond necklets.'

The proprietor did not fall into the smug-faced young man's juvenile error. He knew his trade too well. The two fellow-tribesmen had measured one another at a glance. He

brought down a couple of cases and opened them temptingly before Mr. Solomons' face. Mr. Solomons turned them over with critical hand and eye.

'Not good enough,' he said laconically, and the proprietor nodded.

'How are these?' the jeweller asked, striking a higher note, three octaves up on the gamut of price.

Mr. Solomons regarded them with a shadow on his face. He knew exactly how much he meant to give (which was just why he refrained from mentioning a figure), and he thought these were probably far above his intention. In fact, in order to clarify his conceptions and bring his rusty knowledge well up to date, he had already priced several small lots of gems that very morning at several Christian jewellers'.

'How much?' he asked suspiciously. For he had come to a shop of his own race for the express reason that here only could he indulge in the luxury of bargaining.

'Four hundred pounds,' the proprietor said, looking hard at him without moving a muscle.

Mr. Solomons shook his head resolutely.

‘More than I want to give,’ he replied in that tone of conviction which precludes debate. ‘It won’t do. Show me another.’

The proprietor gauged the just mean at once.

‘Try these, then,’ he said persuasively.

Mr. Solomons’ eye picked out its choice at a glance.

‘That’ll do,’ he answered, selecting one that precisely suited as to quality. ‘Lowest figure for this?’

The proprietor glanced at him with inquiring eyes.

‘What do you want it for?’ he asked.

‘It’s for a lady of title,’ Mr. Solomons answered, swelling with just pride. ‘What’ll you take for it?’

The proprietor put his head on one side reflectively.

‘We have a fixed price, of course,’ he said.

‘Of — course,’ Mr. Solomons echoed slowly.

‘But to *you*, Mr. Solomons, as a friend of our friend Mocatta’s, and as it’s for a present,

apparently, we'll consent to make it—three hundred guineas.'

'Why *we*?' Mr. Solomons inquired abstractedly. 'I came here believing I dealt between man and man. I object to *we*. I deal with principals.'

'*I'll* make it three hundred, then,' the proprietor corrected gravely.

'Why guineas?' Mr. Solomons went on once more with chilly precision. 'No, don't say pounds, please. That's why I ask you. Why make it guineas? You put it in guineas for people with whom you mean to strike off the odd shillings only. That won't do for me, I'm too old for that. As a basis for negotiations, if you please, we'll begin with pounds. *Begin* with pounds, I say, Mr. Zacharias: mind, *begin*, you understand, not end with them.'

'Begin with three hundred and fifteen pounds?' the proprietor queried, with his small eyes blinking.

'Certainly, if you wish it,' Mr. Solomons went on. 'I've no objection to your putting on the extra fifteen pounds—three hundred shillings to cover the guineas—if it gives you

any pleasure: as, of course, we shall only have to knock them off at once again. Well, we go on, then, to three hundred pounds for this necklet. . . . Now, Mr. Zacharias, what do you take me for?’

And then began that sharp contest of wits that Mr. Solomons delighted in, and in which Mr. Zacharias, to do him justice, was no unworthy antagonist. The two men’s eyes gleamed with the joy of the conflict as they joined in the fray. It was to them what a game of chess or a debate in the House is to keen, intellectual combatants of another order. They understood one another perfectly—too perfectly to have recourse to the petty blandishments and transparent deceptions wherewith Mr. Zacharias might have attempted to cajole an accidental purchaser. It was Greek meet Greek, diamond cut diamond. The price was to be settled, not in current coin of the realm, but in doubtful paper. And it was to be arrived at by a curious process of double-bargaining, greatly to the taste of either diplomatist. Mr. Solomons was first to bate down Mr. Zacharias to a given price, say a hundred

and fifty, and Mr. Zacharias was then to bate down the doubtful bills till he had arrived at last at a proximate equation between the two sums agreeable to both parties. And to this congenial contest they both addressed their wits in high good-humour, entering into it with the zest that every man displays when pitted against a foeman just worthy of his steel, in a sport at which both are acknowledged masters.

The debate was long, exciting, and varied. But in the end the game was drawn, each side coming off with honourable scars and insignificant trophies. Mr. Solomons calculated that he had got the necklet for two hundred and forty-five pounds' worth of doubtful paper, and that it might fairly be valued at two hundred and fifty. Mr. Zacharias calculated that a knowing customer might have had the necklet for two hundred and forty-two pounds, and that the doubtful bills would probably realize, when discounted, two hundred and sixty. So each left off well satisfied with his morning's work, besides having had a long hour's good intellectual exercise for his money.

And Mr. Solomons went away with the pleasing conviction that if Sir Paul Gascoyne, for example, had bought the necklet in the regular way at a West End jeweller's, he would no doubt have paid that enterprising tradesman the original three hundred guineas demanded for it. Of so great avail is it to a wise man to know the City.

By an odd coincidence, that very same day Paul, for his part, received three letters, all tending greatly to disconcert his settled policy. The first two came by the morning post, the third followed by the eleven o'clock delivery. Was this design or accident? Who shall say? Fortune, that usually plays us such scurvy tricks, now and again indulges, by way of change, in a lucky coincidence.

The first of his letters Paul opened was from Fowey, where Nea was not. It was brief and paternal—the British father in his favourite character of practical common-sense, enforcing upon giddy and sentimental youth the business aspect of life as a commercial speculation. Much as the Reverend Walter Blair, Clerk in Holy Orders, esteemed the

prospective honour of counting Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, as his son-in-law, he must point out to Sir Paul at last that this engagement was running to a truly preposterous length, and that some sort of effort ought to be made to terminate it. 'Does that mean break it off?' Paul queried internally, with a horrid sort of alarm. But no; the next sentence reassured his startled soul as to that doubtful verb. The Reverend Walter Blair had the fullest confidence in his young friend's ability to support his daughter in a way suitable to her position in life, and would urge, on the contrary, that the marriage should be entered into—great heavens! what was this?—on the earliest opportunity! If not—the Reverend Walter Blair was conveniently vague as to what might follow upon his non-compliance: but Paul's heart went down with a very violent sinking indeed as he thought how much that paternal reticence might possibly cover. Vague visions of Nea wedded against her will (oh, boundless imagination of youth!) to a mutton-faced Cornish squire of restricted intelligence oppressed his soul. As though

anybody — even a society mother—could marry off an English girl of Nea Blair's type where she didn't wish to be married! Why, Mrs. Partington with the ocean at her doors had a comparatively wide and correct conception of character and conduct.

He broke open the second letter, posted at Sheffield, and skimmed it through hurriedly. To his immense surprise it pointed in precisely the same direction as Mr. Blair's. Since Nea had been with her, Faith said, in her simple sisterly fashion, she had noticed more than once that that dear girl was growing positively thin and ill with the harassing care of a long engagement. Nea was a dear, and would never complain: not for worlds would she add a jot to Paul's heavy burden while he had still that debt of Mr. Solomons' on his hands; but still, Faith thought, it was hard she should be wasting her golden youth when she ought to be happy and enjoy her ladyship while it would be of most satisfaction and service to her. And since Mr. Solomons himself approved of the union, as Nea told her, why, Faith, for her part, could hardly imagine what reasons could

induce Paul to shilly-shally any longer. 'And Charlie says,' the letter went on, 'he fully agrees with me.'

At eleven o'clock, to clench it all, came a brief little note from Nea herself, design or accident :

'Dear Faith has been declaring to me for the last two days, Paul darling, that it's positively wicked of me to keep you waiting and despairing any longer ; and this morning, by an odd coincidence, the enclosed note came from papa. You will see from it that he's very much in earnest indeed about the matter, and that he objects to our engagement remaining so long indefinite. So, Paul, they've easily succeeded between them at last in talking me over ; and if you think as they do—

'Your always,
'NEA.'

Paul laid down the note, and reflected seriously.

CHAPTER XLVII.

‘PUTTING ON THE SCREW.’

THE combination was too strong in the end for Paul. Faith and Nea, backed up by Mr. Solomons' advice and Mr. Blair's protest, were more than the sternest virtue could resist—especially when inclination itself lay disturbing the balance in the self-same scale. Paul wavered—and was lost. Before he knew exactly how it was all happening, he found himself the central, though secondary, figure of a domestic event. He was given to understand by all parties concerned that he had been duly selected by external destiny for the post of bridegroom in a forthcoming wedding.

And, indeed, if he continued to harbour any passing doubts upon the subject himself,

the periodical literature of his country must shortly have undeceived him. For, happening to drop in at his club the next Saturday afternoon—as a journalist, Paul had regarded the luxury of membership at the Cheyne Row as a trade expense—he lighted by chance upon a paragraph of gossip in that well-known second-rate society paper, the *Whisperer*: ‘A marriage has just been arranged, and will take place early next month, between Sir Paul Gascoyne, Bart., of Hillborough, and Nea Mary, only daughter of the Rev. Walter Blair, Rector of Lanhydran, near Fowey, Cornwall. Sir Paul, though he rejoices in the dignity of a fourteenth baronet, and boasts some of the bluest blood in Glamorganshire, is by no means overwhelmed with this world’s wealth; but his career at Christ Church was sufficiently distinguished, and he has since made his mark more generally as a journalist and essayist in the London Press. Unless he throws away his opportunities and wastes his talents, the new proprietor ought to do much in time to restore the lost glories of Gascoyne Manor.’

A fiery red spot burnt in Paul's cheek as he laid down the indiscreet sheet with its annoying blunders, and picked up, for a change, its rival, the *Blab* of a week later date. There, almost the first words that met his eyes were those that composed his own name, staring him in the face in that rudely obtrusive way that one's own name always does stare at one from a printed paper. ‘No, no, *Arthur*,’ the editor of the *Blab* remarked, in his gently colloquial style to his brother chronicler; ‘you're out of it this time about young Gascoyne, of Christ Church. Sir Paul Emery Howard Gascoyne—to give him the full benefit of his empty title, for it carries no money—is the fifteenth—not as you say, the fourteenth—baronet of that ancient family. He is not of Hillborough, which was only the place where his late respected papa carried on a harmless, though useful, calling; but of a decent lodging-house in Somers Row, Gower Street. He has nothing to do in any way with Gascoyne Manor, the old seat of his ancestors, which is the property of a distant and not over-friendly cousin. And if you mean to

insinuate by certain stray hints about wasted opportunities and so forth and so forth that Miss Blair, his future wife, has money of her own, allow us to assure you, on the very best authority, that the lady's face is her fortune,—and a very pretty fortune, too, it might have been, if she hadn't chosen to throw it away recklessly on a penniless young journalist with a useless baronetcy. However, Sir Paul has undoubtedly youth and brains on his side, and, if *you* don't succeed in spoiling his style, will, no doubt, manage to pull through in the end by the aid of a pen which is more smart than gentlemanly. Give him a post on your staff outright, dear *Arthur*, and he'll exactly suit the requirements of the *Whisperer*.'

Paul flung down the paper with a still angrier face. But, whatever else he felt, one thing was certain: he couldn't now delay getting married to Nea.

The opinion of others has a vast effect upon even the most individualistic amongst us. And so it came to pass that Paul Gascoyne was dragged, at last, half against his will, into marrying Nea within the

month, without having ever got rid of his underlying feeling that to do so was certainly foolish and almost wicked.

The wedding was to take place at Lanhedran, of course; and such a gathering of the clans from all parts of the world the little Cornish village had seldom witnessed! Charlie Thistleton and Faith were at Paddington to meet Paul and accompany him down; while the master-cutler and his wife, unable to avoid this further chance of identifying themselves with the Gascoyne family, were to follow in their wake half a day later. Paul was delighted to find that Faith, whom he hadn't seen for a year, had changed less than he expected, and far less than he feared. She had expanded with the expansion in her position, to be sure, as Mr. Solomons noted, and was quite at home in her new surroundings. Less than that would be to be less a woman; but she retained all her old girlish simplicity, for all that, and she was quite as fiercely herself in sentiment as ever.

'We'll travel first, Faith,' Charlie Thistleton said apologetically, 'for the sake

of getting a carriage to ourselves. I know you and Paul will want to have a little family confab together after not seeing one another so long ; now, won't you ?

‘ Oh, well, if you put it on that ground,’ Faith answered, mollified, ‘ I don’t mind going first just this once, to please you. Though up in the North Country, Paul, I always insist upon travelling third still, just to scandalize Charlie’s grand acquaintances. When they ask me why, I always say, “ Because that’s what I’m accustomed to ; I never could afford to go second before I was married.” And you should just see their faces when I add quietly, “ Sir Paul and I were never rich enough to get beyond thirds ; and I suppose poor Paul will have to go third as long as he lives, for he doesn’t mean, like me, to marry above him.” ’

‘ But I do,’ Paul answered, with a gentle smile. ‘ I remember, when I first met dear Nea at Mentone, what an awful swell I thought her, and how dreadfully afraid I was even of talking to her.’

‘ Well, run and get the tickets, Charlie,’ Mrs. Thistleton said, turning to her obedient

slave; ‘and if by any chance Mrs. Douglas is going down by this particular train, try to keep out of her way; for I want, if possible, to have my brother to myself for the last time this one long journey.’

By the aid of half a crown, judiciously employed in contravening the company’s regulations as to gratuities to porters, they succeeded in maintaining the desired privacy; and Faith could gossip to her heart’s content with Paul about everything that had happened since their last meeting. She was particularly curious to know about Mr. Solomons—his ways and doings.

‘I always thought, do you know, Paul,’ she said, ‘that, in a certain sort of queer, unacknowledged way, Mr. Solomons had an undercurrent of sneaking regard for you—a personal liking for you and a pride in what he’s made of you. I don’t think it was all mere desire for your money.’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure,’ Paul answered. ‘I’ve a great regard for Mr. Solomons myself. I’m sure it’s to him entirely I owe my present position, such as it is. And I believe he honestly desired, in his way, to serve me.’

The idea of the baronetcy going to waste, as a marketable commodity, first weighed upon his mind, of course. Whether it was his own, or whether it was somebody else's, it vexed his good commercial soul to see so much intrinsic value running away, as it were, like beer from a barrel, all for nothing. But when once he got fairly embarked in the scheme, it became an end in itself to him—his favourite idea, his pet investment; and I was a part of it: he liked me because he had made me himself. It gave him importance in his own eyes to be mixed up with the family of an English baronet.'

'Oh, I'm sure he likes all your family personally,' Charlie Thistleton put in, in spite of a warning look from his wife. 'You should hear the way he writes to Faith about you!'

'Writes to Faith!' Paul repeated, surprised.

'Well, yes,' Charlie answered, pulling himself up short with the contrite air of the husband who knows he has exceeded his wife's instructions. 'He wrote a letter to Faith about you once—some months ago; and he said he was proud of the position you

were making for yourself in literary London. He also remarked you were paying up arrears with pleasing promptitude.’

‘It’s curious he makes you go on paying, and grinding you so hard,’ Faith mused meditatively, ‘when he’s got nobody left on earth now to grind you for.’

‘It’s habit!’ Paul answered — ‘mere ingrained habit. He grinds by instinct. And he likes to feel, too, that I’m able to pay him. He likes to think his money wasn’t wasted or his confidence misplaced. Though he considers me a fool for not marrying an heiress, he considers, too, it proves his own sagacity that he should have known I’d leave no stone unturned till I’d honestly repaid him.’

‘It’s a great pity,’ Charlie Thistleton interposed, looking out of the window and delivering himself slowly of an abstract opinion *à propos* of nothing in particular, ‘that some people are so devilish proud as they are. They’d rather toil and slave and worry themselves for a lifetime, than accept a few paltry unimportant hundreds from their friends and relations.’

‘Oh, Charlie! he couldn’t!’ Faith cried, flushing up. ‘He wouldn’t be Paul at all if he did that. I know we’d all love to help him if it was possible. But it isn’t possible. Anybody who knows him knows he’ll never be satisfied till he’s worked it all off and paid it himself. Mr. Solomons knows it; and perhaps that’s why he’s so hard upon him, even. He wants to give him a spur and a stimulus to work, so that he may get it all paid off as soon as possible, and be free to do better things in the end for himself and Nea.’

‘My dear child,’ Charlie put in, ‘you’re really too trustful.’

‘Well, anyhow, he wants Paul to marry Nea, now,’ Faith said, relapsing into her corner.

‘Because he thinks I’ll work better when it’s all settled,’ Paul retorted, half undecided himself which side to take. ‘There’s no doubt about it, Faith, he’s grown harder and more money-grubbing than ever since Lionel Solomons died. He reckons every farthing and grumbles over every delay. I suppose it’s because he’s got nothing else left to live for now. But he certainly grinds me

very hard indeed, and wants more every time. as if he was afraid he'd never live to get back his money.'

'Ah, that's it, you see!' Faith answered. 'That's just the explanation. While that horrid boy was alive, he expected to leave his money to him; and if Mr. Solomons himself didn't get the return, Lionel would have got it. But now, he must have it all repaid in his own lifetime, or it'll be no use to him. What does it matter to him, after all, whether the Jewish Widows and Orphans have a hundred or a thousand more or less? It's only the pursuit of money for its own sake that's left him now. He goes on with that by mere use and custom.'

All the way down to Cornwall, in fact, they discussed this important matter, and others of more pressing and immediate interest; and all the way down Faith noticed that Paul was going to his wedding with many grave doubts and misgivings on his mind as to whether or not he was right at all in marrying under such circumstances. It's hard for a man to start on his honeymoon with a millstone round his neck; and

Faith cordially pitied him. Yet, none the less, she was characteristically proud of him for that very feeling. Paul would have been less of a Gascoyne, she felt, if he could have accepted aid or help in such a strait from any man. He had made his own maze, no matter how long since, and now he must puzzle his own way out of it.

At Fowey Station a strange surprise awaited them. They got out of their carriage, and saw on the platform a familiar figure which quite took Faith's breath away.

'Mr. Solomons!' she exclaimed in astonishment. 'You here! This is indeed'—she was just going to say 'an unexpected pleasure'—but native truthfulness came to her aid in time, and she substituted instead the very non-committing word 'wonderful!'

Mr. Solomons, somewhat bluer in the face than was his wont, drew himself up to his full height of five feet five as he extended his hand to her with a cordial welcome. He had never looked so blooming before since poor Leo's death. Nor had Faith ever seen him so closely resemble a well-to-do solicitor. He had spared no pains or

expense, indeed, on his sartorial get-up. All that the tailor's art and skill could do had been duly done for him. He was faultlessly attired in positively neat and gentlemanly clothes ; for he had put himself implicitly in the hands of a good West End house ; and, distrusting his own taste and that of his race, had asked to be dressed from head to foot in a style suitable for a baronet's wedding-party. The result was really and truly surprising. Mr. Solomons, with a flower in his button-hole and a quiet tie round his neck, looked positively almost like a Jewish gentleman.

‘ Well, yes, Mrs. Thistleton,’ the old money-lender said, with a deep-blue blush. ‘ I fancied you'd be rather taken aback when you saw me. It isn't every day that I get an invitation to a wedding in high life ; but Miss Blair was kind enough to send me a card ; and I thought, as I was one of Sir Paul's oldest and earliest friends, I could hardly let the occasion pass without properly honouring it. So I've taken rooms by telegraph at the hotel in the town ; and I hope to see you all by-and-by at the church on Thursday.’

The apparition was hardly a pleasant one for Paul. If the truth must be confessed, he would have liked, if possible, on that one day in his life, if never before or after, to be free from the very shadow of Mr. Solomons' presence. But Nea had no doubt good reasons of her own for asking him—Nea was always right—and so Paul grasped his old visitor's hand as warmly as he could, as he muttered in a somewhat choky and dubious voice a half-inarticulate 'Thank you.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MR. SOLOMONS COMES OUT.

THE wedding-day came, and the gathering of the clans at Lanhydran Church was indeed conspicuous. Mrs. Douglas was there from Oxford (with the Arcadian Professor well in tow), discoursing amicably to Faith of the transcendent merits of blue blood, and of how perfectly certain she was that, sooner or later, Paul would take his proper place in Parliament, and astonish the world with some magnificent scheme for Imperial Federation, or for the Total Abolition of Poverty and Crime in Great Britain and Ireland. The Thistletons senior were there looking bland and impressive, with the consciousness of having given the bride as handsome a present as anybody else in all the wedding-party was likely to bestow upon her. Half

a dozen of Paul's undergraduate friends or London acquaintances had come down to grace the ceremony by their august presence, or to make copy for society papers out of the two young people's domestic felicity. The county of Cornwall was there in full force to see a pretty Cornish girl recruit the ranks of metropolitan aristocracy. And Mr. Solomons was there, with hardly a trace of that cold, hard manner left upon his face, and his fingers finding their way with a fumbling twitch every now and again to his right coat-tail pocket, which evidently contained some unknown object to whose continued safety Mr. Solomons attached immense, and indeed overwhelming, importance.

As for Nea, she looked as charming as ever—as charming, Paul thought, as on that very first day when he had seen her and fallen in love with her on the promenade at Mentone. And when at last in the vestry, after all was over, he was able to print one kiss on her smooth white forehead, and to say ‘my wife’ in real earnest, he forgot for the moment all other thoughts

in the joy of that name, and felt as though Mr. Solomons and his hapless Claims had never existed.

Mr. Solomons himself, however, was by no means disposed to let the opportunity pass by so easily. As soon as everybody had signed the book and claimed the customary kiss from the bride, Mr. Solomons, too, pressed forward with a certain manifest eagerness on his impulsive countenance. He took Nea's two hands in his own with a fatherly air, and clasped them tight for a moment, quite tremulous with emotion. Nea held up her blushing cheek timidly. Mr. Solomons drew back. A maiden fear oppressed his soul. This was too much honour. He had never expected it. 'Dare I, my lady?' he asked in a faltering voice. He was the first who had called her so. Nea replied with a smile and a deeper blush. Mr. Solomons leant forward with instinctive courtesy, and, bending his head, just touched with the tips of his pursed-up lips that dainty small hand of hers. It was the greatest triumph of his life—a reward for that doubtful and dangerous long investment.

That he should live to kiss with his own two lips the hand of the lady of an English baronet!

As he rose again, blushing bluer in the face than ever, he drew from his pocket a large morocco case, and taking out of it a necklet of diamonds set in gold, he hung them gracefully enough round Nea's neck with an unobtrusive movement. A chorus of admiring 'Ohs!' went up all round from the circling group of women. Mr. Solomons had loosed his little bolt neatly. He had chosen the exact right moment for presenting his wedding gift. Even old Mr. Thistleton, complacent and urbane, was taken aback by the shimmering glitter of the pretty baubles, and reflected with some chagrin that his own set of massive silver dessert-dishes was thrown quite into the shade now by Mr. Solomons' diamonds.

Paul was the only person who failed to appreciate the magnificence of the present. He saw, indeed, with surprise that Mr. Solomons had presented Nea with a very pretty necklet. But beyond that vague feeling he realized nothing. He was too

simply a man to attach much importance to those useless gewgaws.

The breakfast followed, with its usual accompaniments of champagne and speeches. The ordinary extraordinary virtues were discovered in the bridegroom, and the invariably exceptional beauty and sweetness of the bride met with their due meed of extravagant praise. Nothing could be more satisfactory than everyone's opinion of everyone else. All the world had always known that Sir Paul would attain in the end to the highest honours literature could hold out to her ambitious aspirants—perhaps even to the editorship of the *Times* newspaper. All the world had always considered that Lady Gascoyne—how Nea sat there blushing and tingling with delight as she heard that long-expected title now really and truly at last bestowed upon her—deserved exactly such a paragon of virtue, learning, and talent as the man who had that day led her to the altar. Everybody said very nice things about the bridesmaids and their probable fate in the near future. Everybody was polite, and appreciative, and eulogistic, so that all the

world seemed converted for the moment into a sort of private Lanhydran Mutual Admiration Society, Limited, and believed as such, with unblushing confidence.

At last, Mr. Solomons essayed to speak. It was in answer to some wholly unimportant toast ; and as he rose he really looked even more like a gentleman, Faith thought to herself, than at the station last evening. He put his hand upon the table to steady himself, and gazed long at Paul. Then he cleared his throat and began nervously, in a low tone that was strangely unfamiliar to him. He said a few words, not without a certain simple dignity of their own, about the immediate subject to which he was supposed to devote his oratorical powers ; but in the course of half a minute he had wandered round to the bridegroom, as is the oblique fashion with most amateur speakers on these trying occasions. 'I have known Sir Paul Gascoyne' he said, and Faith, watching him hard, saw with surprise that tears stood in his eyes, 'ever since his head wouldn't have shown above this table.' He paused a second and glanced once more at Paul. 'I've always

known him,' he continued, in a very shaky voice, 'for what he is—a gentleman. There's no truer man than Sir Paul Gascoyne in all England. Once I had a boy of my own—a nephew—but my own—I loved him dearly.' He paused once more, and struggled with his emotion. 'Now I've nobody left me but Sir Paul,' he went on, his eyes swimming, 'and I love Sir Paul as I never could have loved any—any—any——'

Faith rose and caught him. Mr. Solomons was bluer in the face now than ever before. He gasped for breath, he staggered as he spoke, and accepted Faith's arm with a quiet gratitude.

'Dear Mr. Solomons,' Faith said, supporting him, 'you'd better sit down now, at once—hadn't you?'

'Yes, yes, my dear,' Mr. Solomons cried, bursting all of a sudden into hasty tears, more eloquent than his words, and subsiding slowly. 'I've always said, and I shall always say, that your brother Paul's the very best young fellow in all England.'

And he sank into his seat.

Have you ever noticed that, after all's over,

the bride and bridegroom, becoming suddenly conscious that they're terribly faint, and have eaten and drunk nothing themselves owing to the tempest and whirlwind of congratulations, invariably retire in the end to the deserted dining-room, with three or four intimate friends, for a biscuit and a glass of claret? In that position Paul and Nea found themselves half an hour later, with Faith and Thistleton to keep them company.

'But what does this all mean about Mr. Solomons?' Faith inquired in an undertone. 'Did you ever see anything so queer and mysterious as his behaviour?'

'Why, I don't know about that,' Paul answered. 'I saw nothing very odd in it. He's always known me, of course, and he was naturally pleased to see me so well married.'

'Well, but Paul dear,' Faith exclaimed impressively, 'just think of the necklet!'

'The necklet!' Paul answered in a careless tone. 'Oh yes, the necklet was very pretty.'

'But what did he mean by giving it to her?' Faith asked once more in an excited whisper. 'I think, myself, it's awfully symptomatic.'

‘Symptomatic?’ Paul echoed inquiringly.

‘Why, yes,’ Faith repeated. ‘Sympathetic, of course. Such a lovely present as that! What on earth else could he possibly give it to her for?’

‘Everybody who comes to a wedding gives the bride a present, don’t they?’ Paul asked, a little mystified. ‘I always thought, after we met him at Fowey Station, Mr. Solomons would give a present to Nea. He’s the sort of man who likes things done decently and in order. He’d make a point of giving tithe of mint, anise, and cummin.’

‘Mint, anise, and cummin!’ Faith retorted contemptuously. ‘Why, what do you think that necklet would cost, you stupid?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know,’ Paul answered; ‘five pounds, I suppose, or something of that sort.’

‘Five pounds!’ the two women repeated in concert, with a burst of amusement.

‘Why, Paul dear,’ Nea went on, taking it off and handing it to him, ‘that necklet must have cost at least three hundred guineas the set—at least three hundred!’

Paul turned it over dubiously, with an

awe-struck air. 'Are you sure, Nea?' he asked incredulously.

'Quite sure, dear,' Nea answered. 'And so's Faith; aren't you, Faith?'

Faith nodded acquiescence.

'Well, all I can say,' Paul replied, examining the thing closely with astonished eyes, 'is—it doesn't look worth it.'

'Oh yes!' Faith put in, admiring it, all enthusiasm. 'Why, they're just lovely, Paul. It's the most beautiful necklet I ever saw anywhere.'

'But what did he do it for?' Paul asked in amaze. It was his turn now to seek in vain for some hidden motive.

'Ah, that's the question,' Charlie Thistleton continued with a blank stare. 'I suppose he thought Lady Gascoyne ought to have jewels worthy of her position.'

'I don't know,' Paul went on, drawing his hand across his brow with a puzzled air. 'If it's worth what you say, it's one of the strangest things I ever heard. Three hundred pounds! Why, that'd be a lot of money for anybody to spend upon it.'

To say the truth, he looked at the

diamonds a trifle ruefully. In the first flush of surprise he almost wondered whether, when he next called round at the High Street, Hillborough, Mr. Solomons would want him to sign another bond for three hundred pounds, with interest at twenty per cent. per annum, for jewellery supplied for Lady Gascoyne's wedding.

At that moment a flutter in the coterie disturbed him. He roused himself from his reverie to see Mr. Solomons gazing in at the open door, and evidently pleased at the attention the party was bestowing upon his treasured diamonds.

Nea looked up at him with that sunny smile of hers.

'We're all admiring your lovely present Mr. Solomons,' she said, dangling it once more before him.

Mr. Solomons came in, still very blue in the face, and took her two hands affectionately in his, as he had done in the vestry.

'My dear,' he said, gazing at her with a certain paternal pride, 'when I first knew Sir Paul was going to marry you, or was thinking of marrying you, I won't pretend to

deny I was very much disappointed. I thought he ought to have looked elsewhere for money—money. I wanted him to marry a woman of wealth. . . . My dear, I was wrong—I was quite wrong. Sir Paul was a great deal wiser in his generation than I was. He knew something that was better far than money.’ He drew a deep sigh. ‘I could wish,’ he went on, holding her hands tight, ‘that all those I loved had been as wise as he is. Since I saw you, my dear, I’ve appreciated his motives. I won’t say I’m not disappointed now—to say merely that would be poor politeness—I’m happy and proud at the choice he’s made—I, who am—perhaps—well, there—your husband’s oldest and nearest friend at Hillborough.’

He gazed across at her once more, tenderly, gently. Paul was surprised to find the old man had so much chivalry left in him still. Then he leaned forward yet a second time and kissed her white little hand with old-fashioned courtesy.

‘Good-bye, my dear,’ he said, pressing it. ‘Good-bye, Sir Paul ; I’ve a train to catch, for I’ve business in London—important busi-

ness in London—and I thought I'd better go up by the train before the one you and Lady Gascoyne have chosen. But I wanted to say good-bye to you both quietly in here before I went. My child, this is the proudest day I ever remember. I've mixed on equal terms with the gentlefolk of England. I'm not unmindful of all the kindness and sympathy you've all extended this morning to an old Jew money-lender. My own have never been to me as you and Paul have been to-day.' He burst into tears again. 'From my heart, I thank you, my dear,' he cried out, faltering; 'from my poor old, worn-out, broken-down heart, ten thousand times I thank you.'

And before Paul in his amazement could blurt out a single word in reply he had kissed her hand again with hot tears falling on it, and glided from the door towards the front entry. Next minute he was walking down the garden-path to the gate, erect and sturdy, but crying silently to himself as he had never cried in his life before since Lionel betrayed him.

CHAPTER XLIX.

TO PARIS AND BACK, SIXTY SHILLINGS.

A JOURNALIST'S holiday is always short. Paul had arranged for a fortnight away from London—he could afford no more—and to that brief span he had to cut down his honeymoon. But he was happy now in his full possession of Nea—too happy, indeed, when all was irrevocably done, even to think of the shadow of those outlying claims that still remained unsatisfied in the safe at Hillborough.

In a fortnight a man can't go very far. So Paul was content to take his bride across to Paris. On their way back he meant to stop for a couple of nights at Hillborough, where he could do his work as well as in town, so that Nea might make his mother's

acquaintance. For Mrs. Gascoyne had wisely refused to be present at the wedding. She preferred, she said, to know Paul's wife more quietly afterwards, when Nea could take her as she was, and know her for herself, without feeling ashamed of her before her fine relations.

It was late autumn, and the town was delightful. To both Paul and Nea, Paris was equally new ground, and they revelled, as young people will, before they know any better, in the tawdry delights of that meretricious capital. Don't let us blame them, we who are older and wiser and have found out Paris. At their age, remember, we, too, admired its glitter and its din; we, too, were taken in by its cheap impressiveness; and we, too, had not risen above the common vulgarities of the boulevards and the Bois and the Champs Elysées. We found in the Français that odious form of entertainment—'an intellectual treat'; and we really believed in the Haussmannesque monstrosities that adorn its streets as constituting what we called, in the gibberish of our heyday, 'a very fine city.' If we know better now—if we

understand that a Devonshire lane is worth ten thousand Palais Royals, and a talk under the trees with a pretty girl is sweeter than all the tents of iniquity—let us, at least, refrain from flaunting our more excellent way before the eyes of a giddy Philistine world, and let us pardon to youth, in the flush of its honeymoon, a too ardent attachment to the Place de la Concorde and the Magasins du Louvre.

Yet, oh, those Magasins du Louvre! How many heartburns they caused poor Paul! And with what unconscious cruelty did Nea drag him through the endless corridors of the Bon Marché on the other side of the water.

‘What a lovely silk! Oh, what exquisite gloves! And how charming that chair would look, Paul, wouldn’t it? in our drawing-room in London, whenever we get one.’

Ah, yes, whenever! For Paul now began to feel as he had never felt in his life before the sting of his poverty. How he longed to give Nea all these beautiful gewgaws: and how impossible he knew it! If only Nea could have realized the pang she gave

him each time she admired those pretty frocks and those delightful hats and those exquisite things in Persian or Indian carpets, she would have cut out her own tongue before she mentioned them. For it was to be their fate for the present to live in lodgings in London till that greedy Mr. Solomons was finally appeased, and even then they would have to save up for months and months before they were in a position to furnish their humble cottage, not with Persian rugs and carved oak chairs, but with plain Kidderminster and a good deal suite from the extensive showrooms of the Tottenham Court Road cabinet-maker.

Revolving these things in his mind, on the day before their return to dear foggy old England, Paul was strolling with Nea down the Champs Elysées, and thinking about nothing else in particular, when suddenly a bow and a smile from his wife, delivered towards a fiacre that rolled along in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe, distracted his attention from his internal emotions to the mundane show then passing before him. He turned and looked. A lady in the fiacre,

remarkably well dressed, and pretty enough as forty-five goes, returned the bow and smile, and vainly tried to stop the cabman, who heeded not her expostulatory parasol thrust hastily towards him.

For a moment Paul failed to recognise that perfectly well-bred and glassy smile. The lady was so charmingly got up as almost to defy detection from her nearest friend. Then, next instant, as the tortoiseshell eyeglasses transfixed him with their glance, he started and knew her. That face he had seen last the day when Lionel Solomons was buried. It was none other than the Ceriolo!

In an agony of alarm he seized his wife's arm. He could never again permit his spotless Nea to be contaminated by that horrible woman's hateful presence. Why, if she succeeded in turning the cab in time to meet them, the creature would actually try to kiss Nea before his very eyes—she, that vile woman whose vileness he had thoroughly felt on the evening of poor Lionel Solomons' funeral.

'Nea darling,' he cried, hurrying her along with his hand on her arm, 'come as

fast as you can ; I don't want that woman there to stop and speak to you !'

'Why, it's Madame !' Nea answered, a little surprised. 'I don't care for her, of course ; but it seems so unfriendly—and just now above all—to deliberately cut her !'

'I can't help it,' Paul answered. 'My darling, she's not fit company for you.' And then, taking her aside along the alley at the back, beyond the avenue and the merry-go-rounds, he explained to her briefly what she already knew in outline at least, the part they all believed Madame Ceriolo to have borne in luring on Lionel Solomons to his last awful enterprise.

'What's she doing in Paris, I wonder ?' Nea observed reflectively, as they walked on down that less-frequented path towards the Rue de Rivoli.

'I'm sure I don't know,' Paul answered. 'She seemed very well dressed. She must have some sources of income nobody knows of. She couldn't afford to drive about in a carriage like that on the strength of Mr. Solomons' allowance of two hundred.'

Nea shook her head emphatically. 'Oh

dear no!' she answered, 'not anything like it. Why, she's dressed in the very height of fashion. Her mantle alone, if it cost a farthing, must have cost every bit of twenty guineas.'

'It's curious,' Paul murmured in reply. 'I never can understand these people's budget. They seem to pick up money wherever they go. They've no visible means of subsistence, to speak of, yet they live on the fat of the land and travel about as much as they've a fancy to.'

'It's luck,' Nea answered. 'And dishonesty, too, perhaps. One might always be rich if one didn't care how one got one's money.'

By the Place de la Concorde, oddly enough, they stumbled across another old Mentone acquaintance. It was Armitage, looking a trifle less spick-and-span than formerly, to be sure, but still wearing in face and coat and headgear the familiar air of an accomplished *boulevardier*.

He struck an attitude the moment he saw them, and extended a hand of most unwonted cordiality. One would have said

from his manner that the scallywag had been the bosom-friend of his youth, and the best-beloved companion of his maturer years—so affectionate and so warm was his smile of greeting.

‘What, Gascoyne!’ he cried, coming forward and seizing his hand. ‘You here, my dear fellow! And Lady Gascoyne too! Well, this is delightful! I saw all about your marriage in the *Whisperer*, you know, and that you had started for Paris, and I was so pleased to think it was I in great part who had done you the good turn of first bringing you and Lady Gascoyne together. Well, this is indeed a pleasure—a most fortunate meeting! I’ve been hunting up and down for you at every hotel in all Paris—the Grand, the Continental, the Windsor, the Ambassadeurs—but I couldn’t find you anywhere. You seem to have buried yourself. I wanted to take you to this reception at the Embassy.’

‘You’re very kind,’ Paul answered in a reserved tone, for such new-born affection somewhat repelled him by its *empressement*. ‘We’ve taken rooms in a very small hotel

behind the Palais de l'Industrie. We're poor, you know. We couldn't afford to stop at such places as the Grand or the Continental.'

Armitage slipped his arm irresistibly into Paul's. 'I'll walk with you wherever you're going,' he said. 'It's such a pleasure to meet you both again. And how long, Lady Gascoyne, do you remain in Paris?'

Nea told him, and Armitage, drawing down the corners of his mouth at the news, regretted their departure excessively. There were so many things coming off this next week, don't you know. And the Lyttons would of course be so delighted to get them an invitation for that crush at the Elysées.

'We don't care for crushes, thanks,' Paul responded frigidly.

'And who do you think we saw just now, up near the Rond Pointe, Mr. Armitage?' Nea put in, with perfect innocence. 'Why, Madame Ceriolo.'

'Got up younger than ever,' Paul went on with a smile.

It was Armitage's turn to draw himself up now.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said stiffly, ‘but I think—a—you labour under a misapprehension. Her name’s not Ceriolo any longer, you know. Perhaps I ought to have explained before. The truth is, you see’—he stroked his beard fondly—‘well—to cut it short—in point of fact, she’s married.’

‘Oh yes, we know all that,’ Paul answered with a careless wave of the hand. ‘She’s Mrs. Lionel Solomons now, by rights, we’re well aware. I was present at her husband’s funeral. But, of course, she won’t be guilty of such an egregious piece of folly as calling herself by her new name. Ceriolo’s a much better name to trade upon than Solomons, any day.’

Armitage dropped his arm—a baronet’s arm—with a little sudden movement, and blushed brilliant crimson.

‘Oh, I don’t mean *that*,’ he said, looking just a little sheepish. ‘Marie’s told me all that, I need hardly say. It was a hasty episode—mistaken, mistaken! Poor child! I don’t blame her, she was so alone in the world—she needed companionship. I ought to have known it. And the old brute of an

uncle behaved most shamefully to her, too, afterwards. But no matter about that. It's a long story. Happily, Marie's a person not easily crushed. . . . What I meant was this. I thought perhaps you'd have seen it in the papers.' And he pulled out from his card-case a little printed paragraph which he handed to Paul. 'She was married at the Embassy, you see,' he went on, still more sheepishly than before. 'Married at the Embassy, the very same day as you and Lady Gascoyne. In point of fact, the lady you were speaking of is at this present moment—Mrs. Armitage.'

'So she's caught you at last!' was what Paul nearly blurted out in his astonishment on the spur of the moment, but with an effort he refrained and restrained himself. 'I'm sorry I should have said anything,' he replied instead, 'that might for a moment seem disrespectful to the lady you've made your wife. You may be sure I wouldn't have done so had I in the least anticipated it.'

'Oh, that's all right,' Armitage answered, a little crestfallen, but with genial tolerance,

like one well accustomed to such trifling criticisms. 'It doesn't surprise me in the least that you misjudge Marie. Many people misjudge her who don't know her well. I misjudged her once myself, I'm free to confess, as I dare say you remember. But I know better now. You see, it was difficult at first to accept her romantic story in full—such stories are so often a mere tissue of falsehoods—but it's all quite true in her case. I've satisfied myself on that point. She's put my mind quite at ease as to the real position of her relations in the Tyrol. They're most distinguished people, I assure you, the Ceriols of Cericlo—most distinguished people. She's lately inherited a very small fortune from one of them—just a couple of hundred a year or thereabouts. And with her little income and my little income, we mean to get along now very comfortably on the Continent. Marie's a great favourite in society in Paris, you know. If you and Lady Gascoyne were going to stop a week longer here, I'd ask you to dine with us to meet the world at our flat in the Avenue Victor Hugo.'

And when Armitage had dropped them opposite *Galignani's*, Paul observed with a quiet smile to Nea :

‘Well, she’s made the best, anyhow, of poor Mr. Solomons’ unwilling allowance.’

CHAPTER L.

A FALL IN CENTRAL SOUTHERNS.

THE shortest honeymoon ends at last (for, of course, the longest one does), and Paul and Nea were expected back one Thursday afternoon at home at Hillborough.

That day Mr. Solomons was all agog with excitement. He was ashamed to let even his office-boy see how much he anticipated Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne's arrival. He had talked of Sir Paul, indeed, till he was fairly angry with himself. It was Sir Paul here, Sir Paul there, Sir Paul everywhere. He had looked out Sir Paul's train half a dozen times over in his dog-eared Bradshaw, and had then sent out his clerk for another—a new one—for fear the service Sir Paul had written about might be taken off

the Central Southern time-table for September. At last, by way of calming his jerky nerves, he determined to walk over the Knoll and down upon the station, where he would be the first to welcome Lady Gascoyne to Hillborough. And he set out well in time, so as not to have to mount the steep hill too fast ; for the front of the hill is very steep indeed, and Mr. Solomons' heart was by no means so vigorous these last few weeks as its owner could have wished it to be.

However, by dint of much puffing and panting, Mr. Solomons reached the top at last, and sat down awhile on the dry turf, looking particularly blue about the lips and cheeks, to gain a little breath and admire for the fiftieth time that beautiful outlook. And well he might ; for the view from the Knoll is one of the most justly famous among the Surrey Hills. On one side you gaze down upon the vale of Hillborough, with its tall church-spire and town of red-tiled roofs, having the station in the foreground, and the long, steep line of the North Downs at their escarpment backing it up behind with a

sheer wall of precipitous greensward. On the other side you look away across the Sussex Weald, blue and level as the sea, or bounded only on its further edge by the purple summits of the Forest Ridge to southward. Close by, the Central Southern Railway, coming from Hipsley, intersects with its hard iron line a gorse-clad common, and, passing by a tunnel under the sandstone hog's-back of the Knoll, emerges at once on Hillborough Station, embosomed in the beeches and elms of Boldwood Manor.

Mr. Solomons paused and gazed at it long. There was Hipsley, distinct on the common southwards, with a train at the platform bound in the opposite direction, and soon Sir Paul's train would reach there, too, bringing Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne to Hillborough. The old money-lender smiled a pitying smile to himself as he thought how eagerly and how childishly he expected them. How angry he had been with Paul at first for throwing himself away upon that penniless Cornish girl! and now how much more than pleased he felt that his *protégé* had chosen the better part, and not, like Demas and

poor Lionel, turned aside from the true way to a fallacious silver-mine.

‘He’s a good boy, Paul is,’ the old man thought to himself, as he got up from the turf once more, and set out to walk across the crest of the Knoll and down upon the station. ‘He’s a good boy, Paul, and it’s I who have made him.’

He walked forward awhile, ruminating, along the top of the ridge, hardly looking where he went, till he came to the point just above the tunnel. There he suddenly stumbled. Something unexpected knocked against his foot, though the greensward on the top was always so fine and clean and close-cropped. It jarred him for a moment, so sudden was the shock. Mr. Solomons, blue already, grew bluer still as he halted and held his hand to his head for a second to steady his impressions. Then he looked down to see what could have lain in his path. Good heavens! this was queer! He rubbed his eyes.

‘Never saw anything at all like this on the top of the Knoll before. God bless me!’

There was a hollow or pit into which he had stepped inadvertently, some six to eight inches or thereabouts below the general level.

Mr. Solomons rubbed his eyes and looked again. Yes, he was neither daft, nor drunk, nor dazed, nor dreaming. A hollow in the path lay slowly yawning before him.

Slowly yawning ; for next instant Mr. Solomons became aware that the pit was even now in actual progress. It was sinking, sinking, sinking, inch by inch, and he himself, as it seemed, was sinking with it.

As he looked he saw the land give yet more suddenly towards the centre. Hardly realizing even then what was taking place before his very eyes, he had still presence of mind enough left to jump aside from the dangerous spot, and scramble back again to the solid bank beyond it. Just as he did so, the whole mass caved in with a hollow noise, and left a funnel-shaped hole in the very centre.

Mr. Solomons, dazed and stunned, knew, nevertheless, what had really happened. The tunnel — that suspected tunnel — had

fallen in. The brick roof, perhaps, had given way, or the arch had failed somewhere; but of one thing he was certain—the tunnel had fallen.

As a matter of fact, the engineers reported afterwards, rainfall had slowly carried away the sandstone of the hill, a grain at a time, by stream and rivulet, till it had left a hollow space overhead between rock and vaulting. Heavy showers had fallen the night before, and, by water-logging the soil, had added to the weight of the superincumbent strata. Cohesion no longer sufficed to support the mass; it caved in slowly; and at the very moment when Mr. Solomons saved himself on the firm soil at the side, it broke down the brickwork and filled in the tunnel.

But of all this Mr. Solomons for the moment was ignorant.

Any other man in his place would probably have thought at once of the danger involved to life and limb by this sudden catastrophe. Mr. Solomons, looking at it with the eye of a speculator and the ingrained habits of so many years of money-grubbing, saw in it instinctively but one

prospective fact—a certain fall in Central Southern.

Nobody but he was in possession of that important fact now ; he held it as his own—a piece of indubitable special information. By to-morrow morning, all the Stock Exchanges would know it. Everybody would be aware that a large tunnel on the main line of the Central Southern had fallen in ; that traffic would be entirely suspended for six months at least ; that the next half-yearly dividend would be *nil*, or thereabouts ; and that a very large sum must come out of the reserve-fund for the task of shoring up so considerable a subsidence. Mr. Solomons chuckled to himself with pardonable delight. To-day, Central Southern were 98 $\frac{3}{4}$ for the account ; to-morrow, he firmly believed, they would be down to 90.

It was an enormous fall. Think what he stood to win by it !

Just at first his only idea was to wire up to town and sell all the stock he actually possessed, buying in again after the fall at the reduced quotation. But in another moment his businesslike mind saw another

and still grander prospect opening out before him. Why limit himself to the sum he could gain over his own shares? Why not sell out any amount for which he could find buyers—for the account, of course?—in other words, why not agree to deliver Central Southern to any extent next week for 98 $\frac{3}{4}$, when he knew that by that time he could buy as many as ever he wanted for something like 90?

To a man of Mr. Solomons' type the opening was a glorious one.

In a second of time, in the twinkling of an eye, vast visions of wealth floated vaguely before him. With three hours' start of such information as that, any fellow who chose could work the market successfully and make as many thousands as he wished, without risk or difficulty. If buyers could be found, there was no reason, indeed, why he shouldn't sell out at current prices the entire stock of the Central Southern on spec; it would be easy enough to-morrow to buy it all back again at eight or nine discount. So wonderful a chance seldom falls so pat in the way of a man of business. It would be next

door to criminal not to seize upon such a brilliant opportunity of fortune.

In the interests of his heirs, executors, and assigns, Mr. Solomons felt called upon to run for it immediately. He set off running down the Knoll at once, in the direction of Hillborough Station, lying snug in the valley among the elms and beeches below there. There was a telegraph office at the station, and thence Mr. Solomons designed to wire to London. He would instruct his broker to sell as many Central Southern A's for the account as the market would take, and, if necessary, to sell a point or two below the current Stock Exchange quotations.

Blown as he was with mounting the hill, and puffed with running, it was hard work that spurt—but the circumstances demanded it. Thousands were at stake. For the sake of his heirs, executors, and assigns he felt he must run the risk with that shaky old heart of his.

Panting and blowing, he reached the bottom of the hill, and looked into the mouth of the tunnel, through which, as a rule, you could see daylight from the side towards

Hipsley. The change from the accustomed sight gave him a shock of surprise. Thirty or forty yards from the entrance, the tunnel was entirely blocked by a rough mass of débris. If a train came through now there would be a terrible smash. And in that case Central Southern would fall still lower—what with compensation and so forth—perhaps as low as 86-87.

If a train came through there would be a terrible smash. The down-train would have just got off before the fall. The up-train would be coming very soon now. . . . And Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne would be in it!

With a burst of horror, Mr. Solomons realized at last that aspect of the case which to almost anyone else would have been the first to present itself. There was danger to life and limb in the tunnel! Men and women might be mangled, crushed, and killed. And among them would, perhaps, be Paul and Nea!

The revulsion was terrible, horrible, ghastly. Mr. Solomons pulled himself together with a painful pull. The first thing

to do was to warn the station-master, and prevent an accident. The next thing only was to wire up to London, and sell out for the account all his Central Southern.

Sell out Central Southern! Pah! What did that matter? Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne were in the up-train. Unless he made haste, all, all would be lost. He would be left in his old age more desolate than ever.

The new bubble would burst as awfully as the old one.

Fired with this fresh idea, Mr. Solomons rushed forward once more, bluer, bluer than ever, and hurried towards the station, in a bee-line, regardless of the information vouchsafed by the notice-boards that trespassers would be prosecuted. He ran as if his life depended upon his getting there. At all hazards, he must warn them to stop the up-train at Hipsley Station.

By the gate of a meadow he paused for a second to catch his breath and mop his forehead. A man was at work there, turning manure with a fork. Mr. Solomons was blown. He called out loudly to the man, 'Hi, you there! come here, will you!'

The man turned round and touched his hat respectfully.

‘The Knoll tunnel’s fallen in!’ Mr. Solomons blurted out between his convulsive bursts of breath.

The man stuck his fork in the ground and stared stolidly in the direction indicated. ‘So it hev,’ he murmured. ‘Well, naow, that’s cur’ous.’

Mr. Solomons recognised him for the stolid fool of a rustic that he was. There’s only one way to quicken these creatures’ blunted intelligence. He drew out his purse and took from it a sovereign, which he dangled temptingly.

‘Take this,’ he cried, holding it out, ‘and run as fast as you can to the Hillborough station. Tell the station-master the Knoll tunnel has fallen in. Tell him to telegraph to Hipsley and stop the up-train. For God’s sake go, or we shall have an accident!’

In his dull, remote way, urged on by the sovereign, the man took it in—slowly, slowly, slowly; and, as soon as the facts had penetrated through his thick skull, began to run at the top of his speed over hedges and

ditches towards the gate of the station. 'Tell him to telegraph at once,' Mr. Solomons shouted after him. 'The tunnel's blocked; there'll be loss of life unless he looks sharp about it.'

And then, having recovered his breath a bit himself, he crossed the gate and proceeded to follow him. There would still be time to realize that fortune by selling out close at existing prices.

Next instant, with another flash of inspiration, it came across his mind that he had done the wrong thing. No use at all to give warning at Hillborough. The wires went over the tunnel, and he remembered now that the pole had fallen and snapped them in the midst at the moment of the subsidence. There was no communication at all with Hipsley. It was towards Hipsley itself he ought to have gone in the first place. He must go there now, all blown as he was—go there at all hazards. He must warn the train, or Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne would be killed in the tunnel!

It came upon him with all the sudden clearness of a revelation. There was no

time to wait or think. He must turn and act upon it. In a second he had clambered over the gate once more, and, blue and hot in the face, was mounting the Knoll with incredible haste for his weight and age, urged on by his wild desire to save Paul and Nea.

He struggled and scrambled up the steep face of the hill with eager feet. At the top he paused a moment, and panted for breath. The line lies straight in view across the long flat weald. From that panoramic point he could see clearly beneath him the whole level stretch of the iron road. A cloud of white steam sped merrily along across the open lowland. It was the up-train even now on its way to Hipsley.

No time now to stop it before it left the station! But by descending at once on the line and running along upon the six-foot way, he might still succeed in attracting the engine-driver's attention and checking the train before it reached the tunnel.

CHAPTER LI.

A CATASTROPHE.

FIRE^d with this thought and utterly absorbed in his fears for Paul's and Nea's safety, Mr. Solomons hurried down the opposite slope of the ridge, and, scrambling through the cutting, gained the side of the railway. It was fenced in by one of those atrocious barbed-wire fences with which the selfishness of squires or farmers is still permitted to outrage every sentiment of common humanity; but Mr. Solomons was too full of his task to mind those barbarous spikes: with torn clothes and bleeding hands, he squeezed himself through somehow, and ran madly along the line in the direction of Hipsley.

As he did so, the loud snort of a steam-

whistle fell full upon his ear, away over in front of him. His heart sank. He knew it was the train leaving Hipsley Station.

Still he ran on wildly. He must run and run till he dropped now. No time to pause or draw breath. It was necessary to give the engine-driver ample warning beforehand, so that he might put on the brake some time before reaching the mouth of the tunnel.

If not, the train would dash into it at full speed, and not a living soul might survive the collision.

He ran along the six-foot way with all his might, waving his hands frantically above his head towards the approaching train, and doing his best in one last frenzied effort to catch the driver's eye before it was too late. His face was flushed purple with exertion now, and his breath came and went with deadly difficulty. But on he ran, unheeding the warnings of that throbbing heart, unheeding the short, sharp snorts of the train as it advanced, unheeding anything on earth save the internal consciousness of that one imperative duty laid on him. The universe summed itself up to his mind in that

supreme moment as a vast and absorbing absolute necessity to save Paul and Nea.

On, on the wild engine came, puffing and snorting terribly ; but Mr. Solomons, nothing daunted, on fire with his exertions, almost flung himself in its path, and shrieked aloud, with his hands tossed up and his face purple.

‘Stop ! stop ! For God’s sake, stop ! Stop ! stop ! I tell you !’ He ran along backwards now, still fronting the train. ‘Stop ! stop !’ he cried, gesticulating fiercely to the astonished driver. ‘For heaven’s sake stop ! You can’t go on—there’s danger !’

The engine-driver halted and put on the brake. The train began to slow. Mr. Solomons still danced and gesticulated like a madman before it. A jar thrilled through the carriages from end to end. With a sudden effort, the guard, now thoroughly roused to a sense of danger, had succeeded in stopping it at the very mouth of the tunnel. Mr. Solomons, almost too spent to utter a word, shrieked out at the top of his voice, in gasping syllables : ‘The tunnel’s fallen in. You can’t go on. Put back to Hipsley. I’ve come to warn you !’

But there was no need for him to explain any further now. The driver, looking ahead, could see for himself a mass of yellow sand obstructing the way a hundred yards in front. Slowly he got down and examined the road. 'That was a narrow squeak, Bill,' he said, turning to the stoker. 'If it hadn't been for the old gentleman, we'd all 'a been in kingdom come by this time !'

'He looks very queer,' the stoker observed, gazing close at Mr. Solomons, who had seated himself now on the bank by the side, and was panting heavily with bluer face than ever.

'He's run too 'ard, that's where it is,' the engine-driver went on, holding him up and supporting him. 'Come along, sir ; come on in the train with us. We've got to go back to Hipsley now, that's certain.'

But Mr. Solomons only gasped, and struggled hard for breath. His face was livid and leaden by this time. A terrible wave convulsed his features. 'Loosen his collar, Jim,' the stoker suggested. The engine-driver obeyed, and for a moment Mr. Solomons seemed to breathe more freely.

‘Now then, what’s the matter? Why don’t we go on?’ a bluff man cried, putting his head out of a first-class carriage window.

‘Matter enough, sir,’ the engine-driver answered. ‘Tunnel’s broke; road’s blocked ahead; and this old gentleman by the side’s a-dying.’

‘Dying!’ the bluff personage echoed, descending quickly from his seat, and joining the group. ‘No, no; not that! . . . Don’t talk such nonsense! . . . Why, God bless my soul, so he is, to be sure! Valvular disease of the heart, that’s what I make it. Have you got any brandy, boys? Leave him to me. I’ll attend to him. I’m a doctor.’

‘Run along the train, Bill,’ the engine-driver said, ‘and ask if any gentleman’s got a flask of brandy.’

In a minute the stoker returned, followed close by Paul, who brought a little flask, which he offered for the occasion.

‘‘Old up the gen’leman’s ’ead, Jim,’ the stoker said, ‘and pour down some brandy.’

Paul started with horror and amazement.

'Why, my God,' he cried, 'it's Mr. Solomons!'

Mr. Solomons opened his eyes for an instant. His throat gurgled.

'Good-bye, Sir Paul,' he said, trying feebly to grope for something in his pocket. 'Is Lady Gascoyne safe? Then, thank Heaven, I've saved you!'

Paul knelt by his side, and held the flask to his lips. As yet he could hardly comprehend what had happened.

'Oh, Mr. Solomons,' he cried, bending over him eagerly, 'do try to swallow some.' But the blue lips never moved. Only, with a convulsive effort, Mr. Solomons drew something out of his breast-pocket—a paper, it seemed, much worn and faded—and, clutching it tight in his grasp, seemed to thrust it towards him with urgent anxiety.

Paul took no notice of the gesture, but held the brandy still to Mr. Solomons' livid mouth. The bluff passenger waved him aside.

'No good,' he said, 'no good, my dear sir. He can't even swallow it. He's unconscious now. The valve don't act. It's all up, I'm

afraid. Stand aside there, all of you, and let him have fresh air. That's his last chance. Fan him with a paper.' He put his finger on the pulse, and shook his head ominously. 'No good at all,' he murmured. 'He's run too fast, and the effort's been too much for him.' He examined the lips closely, and held his ear to catch the last sound of breath. 'Quite dead!' he went on. 'Death from syncope. He died doing his best to prevent an accident.'

A strange solemn feeling came over Paul Gascoyne. Till that moment he had never truly realized how much he liked the old Jew money-lender. But there, as he knelt on the greensward beside his lifeless body, and knew on what errand Mr. Solomons had come by his death, a curious sense of bereavement stole slowly on him. It was some minutes before he could even think of Nea, who sat at the window behind, anxiously awaiting tidings of this unexpected stoppage. Then he burst into tears, as the stoker and the engine-driver slowly lifted the body into an unoccupied carriage, and called on the passengers to take their seats

while they backed once more into Hipsley Station.

‘What is it?’ Nea asked, seeing Paul return with blanched cheeks and wet eyes to the door of her carriage.

Paul could hardly get out the words to reply.

‘A tunnel’s fallen in—the tunnel under the Knoll that I’ve often told you about; and Mr. Solomons, running to warn the train of danger, has fallen down dead by the side with heart-disease.’

‘Dead, Paul?’

‘Yes, dead, Nea!’

They gazed at one another blankly for a moment. Then, ‘Did he know we were here?’ Nea asked, with a face of horror.

‘I think so,’ Paul answered. ‘I wrote and told him what train we’d arrive by; and he must have found out the accident and rushed to warn us before anybody else was aware it had tumbled.’

‘Oh, Paul, was he alive to see you?’

‘Alive?’ Paul answered. ‘Oh yes, he spoke to me. He asked if you were safe, and said good-bye to me.’

They backed into the station by slow degrees, and the passengers, turning out with eager wonder and inquiry, began a hubbub of voices as to the tunnel and the accident and the man who had warned them, and the catastrophe, and the heart-disease, and the chance there was of getting on to-night, and how on earth they could ever get their luggage carted across to Hillborough Station. But Paul and Nea stood with hushed voices beside the corpse of the man they had parted with so lightly a fortnight before at Lanhydran Rectory.

‘Do you know, Paul,’ Nea whispered, as she gazed awestruck at that livid face, now half pale in death, ‘I somehow felt when he said to me that afternoon, “From my poor, old, worn-out heart I thank you,” I half felt as if I was never going to see him again. He said good-bye to us as one says good-bye to one’s friends for ever. And I am glad, at least, to think that we made him happy.’

‘I’m glad to think so, too,’ Paul answered with tears in his eyes. ‘But, Nea, do you know, till this moment I never realized how truly fond I was of him. I feel now as if an

element had been taken out of my life for ever.'

'Then I think he died happy,' Nea replied decisively.

Slowly and gradually the people at the station got things into order under these altered conditions. Cabs and carriages were brought from Hillborough to carry the through passengers and their luggage across the gap in the line caused by the broken tunnel. Telegrams were sent in every direction to warn coming trains and to organize a temporary local service. All was bustle and noise and turmoil and confusion. But in the midst of the hurly-burly, a few passengers still crowded, whispering, round the silent corpse of the man who had met his own death in warning them of their danger. Little by little the story got about how this was a Mr. Solomons, an estate agent at Hillborough, and how those two young people standing so close to his side, and watching over his body, were Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne, for whose sake he had run all the way to stop the train, and had fallen down dead at the last moment of heart-disease.

In his hand he still clutched that worn and folded paper he had tried to force upon Paul, and his face yet wore in death that eager expression of a desire to bring out words that his tremulous lips refused to utter. They stood there long, watching his features painfully. At last a stretcher was brought from the town, and Mr. Solomons' body, covered with a black cloth, was carried upon it to his house in the High Street. Paul insisted on bearing a hand in it himself; and Nea, walking slowly and solemnly by their side, made her first entry so as Lady Gascoyne into her husband's birthplace.

CHAPTER LII.

ESTATE OF THE LATE J. P. SOLOMONS.

FOR the next week all Hillborough was agog with the fallen tunnel. So great an event had never yet diversified the history of the parish. The little town woke up and found itself famous. The even tenor of local life was disturbed by a strange incursion of noisy navvies. Central Southern's went down like lead to 90, as Mr. Solomons had shrewdly anticipated. The manager and the chief engineer of the line paid many visits to the spot to inspect the scene of the averted catastrophe. Hundreds of hands were engaged at once with feverish haste to begin excavations, and to clear the line of the accumulated débris. But six months at least must elapse, so everybody said, before traffic

was restored to the *status quo* and the Central Southern was once more in working order. A parallel calamity was unknown in the company's history: it was only by the greatest good-luck in the world, the directors remarked ruefully at their next meeting, that they had escaped the onus and odium of what the newspapers called a good first-class murderous selling railway accident.

On one point, indeed, all the London press was agreed on the Friday morning, that the highest praise was due to the heroic conduct of Mr. Solomons, a Jewish gentleman resident at Hillborough, who was the first to perceive the subsidence of the ground on the Knoll, and who, rightly conjecturing the nature of the disaster, hurried—unhappily, at the cost of his own life—to warn the station-masters at either end of the danger that blocked the way in the buried tunnel. As he reached his goal he breathed his last, pouring forth his message of mercy to the startled engine-driver. This beautiful touch, said the leader-writers, with conventional pathos, made a fitting termination to a noble act of self-sacrifice; and the fact that Mr.

Solomons had friends in the train—Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne, who were just returning from their wedding tour on the Continent—rather added to than detracted from the dramatic completeness of this moving *dénoûment*. It was a pleasure to be able to record that the self-sacrificing messenger, before he closed his eyes finally, had grasped the hands of the friends he had rescued in his own dying fingers, and was aware that his devotion had met with its due reward. While actions like these continue to be done in every-day life, the leader-writers felt we need never be afraid that the old English courage and the old English ideal of steadfast duty are beginning to fail us. The painful episode of the Knoll tunnel had at least this consolatory point, that it showed once more to the journalistic intelligence the readiness of Englishmen of all creeds or parties to lay down their lives willingly at the call of a great public emergency.

So poor Mr. Solomons, thus threnodied by the appointed latter-day bards of his adoptive nation, was buried at Hillborough as the hero of the day, with something approaching

public honours. Paul, to be sure, as the nearest friend of the dead, took the place of chief mourner beside the open grave ; but the neighbouring squires and other great county magnates, who under any other circumstances would have paid little heed to the Jewish money-lender's funeral, were present in person, or vicariously through their coachmen, to pay due respect to a signal act of civic virtue. Everybody was full of praise for Mr. Solomons' earnest endeavour to stop the train ; and many who had never spoken well of him before, falling in now, after the feeble fashion of our kind and of the domestic sheep, with the current of public opinion, found hitherto undiscovered and unsuspected good qualities in all the old man's dealings with his fellow-creatures generally.

The day after the funeral, Paul, as Mr. Solomons' last bailee, attended duly, as in duty bound, with the will confided to his care in his hand, at the country attorney's office of Barr and Wilkie's, close by in the High Street.

Mr. Wilkie received him with unwonted courtesy ; but to that, indeed, Paul was now

beginning to grow quite accustomed. He found everywhere that Sir Paul Gascoyne made his way in the world in a fashion to which plain Paul had been wholly unused in his earlier larval stages. Still, Mr. Wilkie's manner was more than usually deferential, even in these newer days of acknowledged baronetcy. He bowed his fat little neck, and smiled with all his broad and stumpy little face—why are country attorneys invariably fat, broad, and stumpy, I wonder?—so that Paul began to speculate with himself what on earth could be the matter with the amiable lawyer. But he began conversation with what seemed to Paul a very irrelevant remark.

‘This smash in the tunnel ’ll have depreciated the value of your property somewhat, Sir Paul,’ he said, smiling and rubbing his hands, as soon as the first interchange of customary civilities was over. ‘Central Southern A’s are down at 89-90.’

Paul stared at him in astonishment.

‘I’m not a holder of stock, Mr. Wilkie,’ he answered after a brief pause of mental wonder.

The attorney gazed back with a comically puzzled look.

‘But Mr. Solomons was,’ he answered. Then after a short pause, ‘What! you don’t know the contents of our poor friend Solomons’ will, then, don’t you?’ he inquired, beaming.

‘Why, that’s just what I’ve come about,’ Paul replied, producing it. ‘A day or two after his nephew Lionel was buried at Lizard Town Mr. Solomons gave me this to take care of, and asked me to see it was duly proved after his death, and so forth. If you look at it, you’ll see he leaves all his property absolutely to the Jewish Board of Guardians in London.’

Mr. Wilkie took the paper from his hand with an incredulous smile, and glanced over it languidly.

‘Oh, that’s all right,’ he answered with a benignant nod—the country attorney is always benignant—‘but you evidently don’t understand our poor friend’s ways as well as I do. It was a fad of his, to tell you the truth, that he always carried his will about with him, duly signed and attested, in his

own breast-pocket, "in case of accident," as he used to put it.'

'Oh yes,' Paul answered; 'I know all that. He carried the predecessor of this about in his pocket just so, and he showed it to me in the train when we were going down to Cornwall, and afterwards, when poor Lionel was dead, he handed the present will over to me to take particular care of, because, he said, he thought he could trust me.'

'Ah, yes,' the man of law answered dryly, looking up with a sharp smile. 'That's all very well as far as it goes. But, as a matter of habit, I know our friend Solomons would never have dreamed of handing over one will to you till he'd executed another to carry in his own breast-pocket. It would have made him fidgety to miss the accustomed feel of it. He couldn't have gone about ten minutes in comfort without one. And, indeed, in point of fact, he didn't. Do you know this paper, Sir Paul?' and the lawyer held up a stained and folded document that had seen much wear. 'Do you know this paper?'

‘Why, yes,’ Paul answered, with a start of recognition. ‘I’ve seen it before somewhere. Ah, now I remember! It’s the paper Mr. Solomons was clutching in his folded fingers when I saw him last, half alive and half dead, at Hipsley Station.’

‘Quite so,’ the lawyer answered. ‘That’s exactly what it is. You’re perfectly right. The men who brought him back handed it over to me as his legal adviser; and though I didn’t draw it up myself—poor Solomons was always absurdly secretive about these domestic matters, and had them done in town by a strange solicitor—I see it’s in reality his last will and testament.’

‘Later than the one I propound?’ Paul inquired, hardly suspecting as yet whither all this tended.

‘Later by two days, sir,’ Mr. Wilkie rejoined, beaming. ‘It’s executed, Sir Paul, on the very same day, I note, as the date you’ve endorsed the will he gave you upon. In point of fact, he must have had this new will drawn up and signed in the morning, and must have deposited the dummy one it superseded with you in the afternoon. Very

like his natural secretiveness, that! He wished to conceal from you the nature of his arrangements. For Lionel Solomons' death seems entirely to have changed his testamentary intentions and to have diverted his estate, both real and personal—well, so to speak, to the next representative.'

'You don't mean to say,' Paul cried astonished, 'he's left it all to Madame Ceriolo—to Lionel's widow?'

The lawyer smiled—a sphinx-like, enigmatic smile. 'No, my dear sir,' he answered in the honeyed voice in which a wise attorney invariably addresses a rich and prospective client. 'He revokes all previous wills and codicils whatsoever, and leaves everything he dies possessed of absolutely and without reserve to—his dear friend, Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet.'

'No; you don't mean that!' Paul cried, taken aback, and clutching at his chair for support, his very first feeling at this sudden access of wealth being one of surprise, delight, and pleasure that Mr. Solomons should have harboured so kindly a thought about him.

‘Yes, he does,’ the lawyer answered, warily making the best of his chance in breaking the good tidings. ‘You can read for yourself if you like, “who has been more than a son to me,” he says, “in my forlorn old age, and in consideration of the uniform gentleness, kindness, sense of justice, and forbearance with which he has borne all the fads and fancies of an exacting and often whimsical old money-lender.”’

The tears rose fast into Paul’s eyes as he read these words. ‘I’m afraid,’ he said after a pause, with genuine self-reproach, ‘I’ve sometimes thought too hardly of him, Mr. Wilkie.’

‘Well,’ the lawyer answered briskly, ‘he screwed you down, Sir Paul, there’s no doubt about that—he screwed you down infernally. It was his nature to screw; he couldn’t help it. He had his virtues, good soul! as well as his faults—I freely admit them; but nobody can deny he was an infernally hard hand at a bargain some times.’

‘Still, I always thought, in a sneaking sort of way, half unknown to himself, he

had my interests truly at heart,' Paul answered penitently.

'Well, there's a note inclosed with the will—a private note,' the lawyer went on, producing it. 'I haven't opened it, of course—it's directed to you; but I dare say it'll clear up matters on that score somewhat.'

Paul broke the envelope and read to himself in breathless silence :

'MY DEAR, DEAR BOY,

'When you open this, I shall be dead and gone. I want your kind thoughts. Don't think too hardly of me. Since Leo died, I've thought only of you. You are all I have left on earth to work and toil for. But if I'd told you so openly, and wiped out your arrears, or even seemed to relax my old ways at all about money, you'd have found me out and protested, and refused to be adopted. I didn't want to spoil your fine sense of independence. To tell you the truth, for my own sake I couldn't. What's bred in the bone will out in the blood. While I live, I must grasp at money, not for myself, but for you: it's become a sort of

habit and passion with me. But forgive me for all that. I hope I shall succeed in the end in making you happy. When you come into what I've saved, and are a rich man, as you ought to be, and admired and respected and a credit to your country, think kindly sometimes of the poor old man who loved you well and left his all to you. Good-bye, my son.

‘Yours ever affectionately,

‘J. P. SOLOMONS.

‘P.S.—If Lady Gascoyne is ever presented at Court, I hope she will kindly remember to wear my diamonds.’

When Paul laid the letter down the tears were dimmer in his eyes than ever.

‘I so often misjudged him,’ he said slowly.
‘I so often misjudged him.’

‘But there’s a codicil to the will, too,’ Mr. Wilkie said cheerfully, after a moment’s pause. ‘I forgot to tell you that. There’s a codicil also. Curiously enough, it’s dated the day after your marriage. He must have gone up to town on purpose to add it.’

‘I remember,’ Paul said, ‘when he left Lanhydran he mentioned he had important business next day in London.’

‘And by it,’ the lawyer continued, ‘he leaves everything, in case of your death before his own, absolutely to Nea, Lady Gascoyne, for her own sole use and benefit.’

‘That was kind,’ Paul cried, much touched. ‘That was really thoughtful of him.’

‘Yes,’ the lawyer answered dryly (sentiment was not very much in his way); ‘and as regards probate, from what I can hear, the value of the estate must be sworn at something between fifty and sixty thousand.’

When Paul went home and told Nea of this sudden freak of fortune, she answered quietly, ‘I more than half suspected it. You know, dear Paul, he wrote to papa while I was stopping at Sheffield, and urged me most strongly to marry you, saying our future was fully assured; and so he did, too, to Faith and Charlie. But he particularly begged us to say nothing to you about the matter. He thought it would only prevent your marrying.’ Then she flung her arms

passionately around her husband's neck. 'And now, darling,' she cried, bursting into glad tears, 'now that those dreadful Claims are settled for ever, and you're free to do exactly as you like, you can give up that horrid journalism altogether, and devote yourself to the work you'd really like to do—to something worthy of you—to something truly great and noble for humanity!'

THE END.